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The Embroidery Trade in Eighteenth-Century Paris and Lyon

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A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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A dissertation fellowship at Winterthur Museum & Library provided a rigorous academic and intellectually stimulating environment in which to write my final chapters. Many of the ideas contained in this thesis were inspired by conversations with resident fellows, librarians, curators and academic staff at Winterthur. I am also grateful for the help and advice I received from numerous librarians, archivists and curators in France, the UK and the US. A special thanks must go to all the staff at the Clothworkers Centre at the V&A and the Musée des Tissus.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unconditional support and encouragement throughout this project. Thank you for believing in me.

DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the professional embroidery trade of eighteenth-century Paris and Lyon within the broader socio-economic context of consumption, retailing and production. It investigates how consumer demand for embroidered clothing changed over time and the effects this had on the retailing and production of embroidery. It argues that embroidery was a highly flexible luxury product which evolved to meet the complicated consumer demand of heterogeneous European elites. Embroidery makes for a useful case study of an ancillary trade of the luxury market which did not require sophisticated machinery or large capital investment.

Embroidery was an important luxury trade in eighteenth-century France, supplying elite consumers across Europe with expensive, hand-made products. Nevertheless, no study to date has investigated the links between the consumption and professional production of French embroidery. There is no major socio-economic study of the trade, comparable with those for other fashion-related trades such as textile designers, shoemakers and seamstresses. Most research on embroidery has focused on the aesthetic qualities of groups of objects, or individual pieces. As a result, the business practices and professional networks of the embroiderers have remained absent from scholarship on the luxury trades of eighteenth-century France. Moreover, such scholarship has focused on cheaper commodities and middle class consumption.

This thesis addresses a significant gap in the current historiography by foregrounding the elite classes and their consumption of an individual luxury product. It sits at the intersection of economic history and the history of textiles and dress. It therefore draws on the traditional sources of economic and social historians such as account books, commercial correspondence and legal proceedings, and also on those used in material culture studies, including embroidered clothing, textile samples and designs. This approach posits a new understanding of the place that professional embroidery occupied within the hierarchy of urban luxury trades in eighteenth-century France.

ABBREVIATIONS

AN: Archives nationales

ADP: Archives de Paris

ADR: Archives départementales du Rhône

AM: Archives municipales de Lyon

BAR: Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service

BHVP: Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris

BNF: Bibliothèque national de France

CH: Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum

MTMAD: Musée des Tissus et des Arts décoratifs de Lyon

VAM: Victoria and Albert Museum

WML: Winterthur Museum & Library

WSRO: West Sussex Record Office

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS, CURRENCIES AND MEASUREMENTS

All translations of French primary manuscript and printed sources are my own unless otherwise indicated, with the original French appearing in the footnotes. The original French has been retained as it was written in manuscript and printed sources, including spelling, grammar and punctuation discrepancies. Where French terms are used in the main body of the text, these appear in parentheses in italics the first time they are used, with the English translation used thereafter where appropriate.

This thesis draws extensively upon *L'Art du brodeur*, a treatise on embroidery by Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin published in 1770. The English translation, *Art of the Embroiderer* (1983) by Nikki Scheuer has made Saint-Aubin's text accessible to the modern-day reader. Where possible, I have used my own translations from the original French facsimile of Saint-Aubin's text which is included with Scheuer's 1983 translation. Where Scheuer's translation has been used, this is indicated clearly in the footnotes.

During the eighteenth century, the currency of France was divided into *livres*, *sols* and *deniers*. One *livre* was worth 20 *sols*; 1 *sol* was worth 12 *deniers*. In English sterling, £1 was worth approximately 24 *livres*.

Fabrics in France during this period were generally measured in ells (*aunes*). One ell measured approximately 119 cm in today's measurements.

GLOSSARY

The following is a glossary of French terms relevant to the embroidery trade during the eighteenth century and which are not used widely today.

À disposition – A term used to denote that something was embroidered (or brocaded) to the shape of the intended final garment.

Couchure – Couching, an embroidery technique where gold, silver or silk threads are laid flat on the surface of the ground material and then sewn into place with small regular stitches, usually in silk.

Faux ouvrier, ouvrier sans qualité – A worker without apprenticeship or guild membership and who worked illegally in the homes of master artisans or in the privileged areas around Paris. Both terms were used interchangeably in the eighteenth century.

Fauxbourgs privilégiés – The ‘privileged areas’ were areas in and around Paris that had been granted the right by royal decree to permit the practice of trades outside of guild jurisdiction. The most famous was the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in the east of Paris.

Gilet – A waist-length waistcoat, straight-cut along its bottom edge above which there were horizontal slits for pockets, signalled by corresponding pocket welts. Popular in the late eighteenth century.

Grand habit – A gown worn for formal occasions at court, characterised by its boned bodice, three lace bands over the upper arm, and a skirt worn over a wide hooped petticoat.

Gros de Naples, gros de Tours – A plain and durable silk, similar to taffeta but with transverse ribs, commonly used as the ground material for embroidered garments, including waistcoats.

Guipure – Raised work, an embroidery technique in which pieces of vellum or paper are arranged into a design and then covered over with gold, silver or silk thread.

Habit à la française, habit complet, habit habillé – A man's suit worn for formal occasions at court, consisting of a matching or coordinated coat, waistcoat and breeches.

Marchands merciers – Shopkeepers who sold a range of luxury goods. The most exclusive were located in the rue Saint-Honoré in Paris.

Paillette – A spangle, a small piece of thin metal used in embroidery with a small hole in the middle through which to pass a needle and thread, more commonly called a sequin in the present day.

Passé – Satin stitch, an embroidery technique where the stitches are arranged parallel to each other as closely as possible, and passed through the fabric.

Robe à l'anglaise – A gown with a fitted bodice, seamed at the waist, usually open at the front to reveal the petticoat; favoured in France from the third quarter of the century.

Robe à la française, robe battante, robe volante – A gown, characterised by box pleats that fall loose from the neck band at the back; sometimes open at the front, sometimes closed; worn with a stomacher to conceal the stays. The fullness at the back reduced during the eighteenth century, as the pleats were sewn down to the shoulder blades.

Tambour – Embroidery technique introduced to Europe from Asia in the late 1750s. The term refers to the round (drum-shaped) frame across which the fabric was secured taut, so that a hook could be passed through to produce a chain stitch. Tambour hooks were also used with regular rectangular frames in France.

Veste – A skirted waistcoat worn throughout the eighteenth century with coat and breeches; its length shortened during the century from knee length to hip-length and its horizontal pockets were concealed by flaps; it sometimes had sleeves.

INTRODUCTION

In 1770, Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin stated in *L'Art du brodeur*, his treatise on embroidery, 'This Art, because of its magnificence and its price, was reserved for a long time for Temples, Kings, and Pontiffs'.¹ Designer to King Louis XV and the son of an embroiderer, Saint-Aubin indicated the precise nature of embroidery as being expensive, opulent, and reserved for those at the highest level of society; a veritable luxury. Yet Saint-Aubin's introduction also suggests that change was in progress, stating that embroidery 'was reserved for a long time' for the court and the Church. This thesis takes Saint-Aubin's statement as a springboard to re-examine the embroidery trade in eighteenth-century Paris and Lyon.

Embroidery was a well-established luxury trade in France by the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the century, the primary markets for the professional embroiderers had indeed been the court and the Church. The popularity of embroidered clothing did not diminish over the course of the eighteenth century. It continued to be purchased and worn, with the trade being sustained by the consumption habits of the upper echelons of society. Embroidery, however, continually evolved over the period to meet the changing demands of its elite clientele. The professional embroiderers' clientele was part of a diverse group of men and women who were at once required by the traditional etiquette of the court to purchase and wear elaborate gold and silver embroidered clothing, yet at the same time were avid consumers of the fast-paced fashions of the city which were characterised by their variety and novelty.²

¹ 'Cet Art par sa magnificence & par son prix, fut long-temps réservé pour les Temples, les Rois & les Pontifes'. Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), p. 15. Scheuer's translation. Hereafter *L'Art du brodeur*.

² Historians have recognised the heterogeneous nature of the nobility and their struggle between the ideals of sartorial etiquette and fashion. See for example Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 191. Dress historians such as Madeleine Delpierre, Aileen Ribeiro and Sarah Piетtre have noted both the increased popularity of embroidery and the variety of embroidered waistcoats available by the middle of the eighteenth century. See for example: Madeleine Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe 1715-1789* (New Haven and

This is the first study to situate French embroidery within the broader socio-economic context of eighteenth-century consumption, retail and production. It argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, the ways in which embroidery was consumed had undergone a significant transformation as consumption oscillated between necessity and desire, and between etiquette and fashion. By using consumption as a lens through which to analyse embroidery, this thesis demonstrates that changing attitudes towards fashion, taste and luxury had a tangible effect on the ways in which embroidered clothing was retailed and produced.

Furthermore, in considering embroidery within the institutional framework of the guild system of eighteenth-century France, it contends that the Paris guild of embroiderers was not an adequate production framework for embroidery during this period. Rather, the expensive nature of embroidery and the complicated networks of both consumer and supplier credit meant that the elaborate networks of subcontracting in which professional embroiderers were entwined led to clandestine production outside of guild jurisdiction. In contrast, the absence of a guild in Lyon to regulate embroidery production enabled producers in this town to keep up with consumer demand for fashion and novelty. Indeed, this thesis proposes that Lyon emerged as a leader of fashion, rather than accepting the general view of the primacy of Paris.

The embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France is a useful case study for investigating the effects of elite consumption on the production of luxury goods. Embroidery was expensive, it was associated with the excess of 'old luxury', and it continued to be produced by a needle in the hand, eschewing the mechanical applications of technology which proliferated during the eighteenth century. It was not until the nineteenth century, with Josué Heilmann's invention of the hand embroidery machine in 1828 in Mulhouse, France, that embroidery would begin to mechanise.³ Yet at the same time there is ample evidence that the products of the embroidery trade were avidly consumed not just within metropolitan France, but by customers who were located across

London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 15; Sarah Piettre, 'An Iconographical Study of 18th Century Men's Waistcoats from the Collection of the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris', *Text*, 43 (2015), 27-32.

³ Heilmann's hand embroidery machine (*machine-à-broder*) used a pantograph system to create stitches which resembled those produced by hand. A detailed description of the invention was published in 1835 in the *Bulletin de la société industrielle de Mulausen*. See 'Machine-à-broder', *Bulletin de la société industrielle de Mulausen*, 38 (1835), 209-51.

Europe. This is evidenced by contemporary correspondence, the accounts of embroiderers and embroidery merchants, and surviving objects housed in museum collections around the world today.⁴

Chronologically, this thesis covers the approximate period from 1680 to 1789, enabling an examination of embroidery during a century of the *ancien régime*, a period of tumultuous social, political, economic and cultural change. The geographical focus of this thesis is France, with a concentration on the cities of Paris and Lyon. Comparing Paris and Lyon allows me to take into account similarities and differences in geographical patterns of consumption and production of embroidery in eighteenth-century France. The sampling will cover these cities for the following principal reasons. Firstly, both the population sizes and the social fabric of the two cities were marginally different, with Paris encompassing both the city and the court, and thus a large nobility.⁵ In contrast, Lyon was home to a small but wealthy nobility, as well as a large merchant class who had made their fortunes through the Lyonnais textile industries.⁶ Secondly, the production contexts of the two cities also differed. The embroidery trade in Paris was regulated by the guild up until 1791, whilst a small area of the city also operated outside of guild jurisdiction. Lyon, however, did not have an embroidery guild. A comparison of the two cities will therefore examine the extent to which institutional context influenced the production of embroidery both nationally and locally. Finally, the importance of Lyon as a centre of silk production is integral to investigating the production and design of embroidery during the eighteenth century.

This introduction will firstly situate my research within the current scholarship on embroidery and interrogate the methodological approaches of dress and textile history, and material culture studies. It will then examine the main historical frameworks pertinent

⁴ The objects that provide this kind of evidence are those which have a recorded provenance of having been owned by a certain individual or having been smuggled (see for example Chapter 1). Most objects do not necessarily have this confirmed provenance. Rather, their trajectory to their current location is usually the result of collectors who have collected the artefacts at a later date.

⁵ Roche estimates that in the years 1680-1700, the population size of Paris was between 400-500,000, with this increasing to 700-750,000 by 1789. The population for Lyon during the eighteenth century is estimated to have been around 100,000. See Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, pp. 68-9.

⁶ Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1970), p. 356.

to this thesis, paying particular attention to the scholarly debates on consumption and luxury, fashion, retail and pre-industrial production and guilds. Next, I assess the advantages and limitations of the primary sources used in this thesis. Finally, I will provide an overview of the chapter structure of this thesis.

Embroidery, Dress and Textile History: Methods and Limitations

The expensive nature of embroidery has long been acknowledged in many studies in the field of fashion and dress history: we know, for instance, that embroidery often cost more than the actual making up of the suit or gown which it adorned. Yet for an embellishment on which so much money was spent, little is known about the trade which produced these intricately hand-sewn designs. Rather, research on embroidery has a tendency to focus on the technical and iconographical sophistication of individual ‘masterpieces’ or collections of objects, or provides a broad chronological overview of embroidery techniques.⁷

This thesis draws on a number of studies in recent years which demonstrate the importance of scholarly investigation on the broader context of embroidery. The work of Danièle Véron-Denise, for example, has highlighted the essential role of embroidery on court dress in demarcating rank within the royal court and proximity to the king.⁸ Her works provide an insight into the interdependence between the embroiderers and upholsterers of *ancien régime* France, suggesting that there is very real foundation for further research on the embroidery trade and its position in the hierarchy of urban trades during this period.⁹ Recently, a doctoral thesis completed in 2008 by Macushla Baudis

⁷ See for example Barbara Dawson, *Metal Thread Embroidery* (London: Batsford, 1976); Mary Eirwen Jones, *A History of Western Embroidery* (London: Studio Vista, 1969); Gail Marsh, *18th Century Embroidery Techniques* (Lewes: Guild of Master Craftsman, 2006); Moira, ‘Thunder, ‘Deserving Attention: Margaretha Helm’s Designs for Embroidery in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of Design History*, 23/4 (2010), 409-27.

⁸ Danièle Véron-Denise, ‘La broderie des costumes de cour en France de Louis XIV à Louis XVI’, in *Fastes de cour et ceremonies royales: Le costume de cour en Europe 1650-1800*, ed. by Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel et Pascale Gorguet Ballesteros (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2009), pp. 90-7.

⁹ Véron-Denise, ‘Brodeurs et broderies dans la France d’ancien régime’, in *Les communautés d’arts et de métiers. Le tapisserie*, ed. by Pascal-François Bertrand (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2015), pp. 79-94.

investigates embroidery for male suiting and waistcoats in Lyon during the period 1780-89, with a specific focus on 39 Lyonnais embroidery designs held in the National Museum of Ireland.¹⁰ Baudis' project has made an important contribution to the understanding of embroidery design and manufacture, as well as contextualising the consumption of luxury products within the material and visual culture of eighteenth-century France. Sarah Piettre's work highlights further the iconographical relevance of the motifs used in embroidery design during the eighteenth century. Through a systematic analysis of the collection of embroidered waistcoats at the Palais Galliera, Musée de la mode de la Ville de Paris, Piettre has demonstrated how embroidery design was heavily influenced by contemporary events and motifs symbolised the changing attitudes and values of French society.¹¹ The recent book by Joan DeJean on the Magoulets, a Parisian family of embroiderers to the royal household, has provided a rigorous case study of the myriad business and financial networks of professional embroiderers in the *ancien régime*.¹² Finally, the work of Fiona Ffoulkes on the first quarter of the nineteenth century has made an important step towards recognising embroidery as a flexible luxury product which was able to adapt to the fluctuating social position of its consumers.¹³

Yet it has to be acknowledged that no study to date has investigated fully the links between the consumption and professional production of fashionable embroidery in eighteenth-century France. This thesis builds upon current scholarship on embroidery through a broadening of the source base and combining a variety of methodological approaches drawn from the fields of economic history, fashion and dress history, and material culture studies. In doing so, it offers a new understanding of the embroidery

¹⁰ Macushla Baudis, 'Embroidery for Male Suiting and Waistcoats in Lyon, 1780-1789: A Cultural Biography of the Designs in the National Museum of Ireland Collection Presented by J.H. Fitzhenry' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, National College of Art and Design, Dublin, 2008).

¹¹ Piettre, 'An Iconographical Study of 18th Century Men's Waistcoats from the Collection of the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris'.

¹² Joan DeJean, *The Queen's Embroiderer: A True Story of Paris, Lovers, Swindlers, and the First Stock Market Crisis* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

¹³ Fiona Ffoulkes, 'All that Glitters... LeRoy and Embroidery', *Text: For the Study of Textile Art Design & History*, 24 (1996), 17-21; Ffoulkes, 'Quality always distinguishes itself: Louis Hippolyte LeRoy and the Luxury Clothing Industry in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris', in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 183-205.

trade of eighteenth-century France which has hitherto remained obscure in the scholarship on the luxury clothing trades.¹⁴

Central to this thesis' analysis is the idea that changes in consumption profoundly affected the retail and production of embroidery. It is primarily an examination of the elite consumer's changing relationship to a traditional luxury product and this is analysed through a range of archival sources alongside object sources, such as surviving embroidered garments and samples. The recent 'material turn' in history has sought to reconcile the economic and social histories of consumption and production with the object-based methodologies of dress history.¹⁵ In recent years, historians have incorporated objects more and more into their research in order to address broader questions around consumption, retail and production.

Material culture is not simply the study of objects, but it is an examination of the meanings behind their physical characteristics and people's varied relationships with them. The way people acquire, use and eventually discard objects throughout time and across cultures is an intrinsic part of using material culture to interrogate the shifting beliefs, values and experiences of societies.¹⁶ For Karen Harvey, the materiality of objects has 'a role to play in creating and shaping experiences, identities and relationships.'¹⁷ Further, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello have highlighted that these relationships encapsulate the 'social, cultural and economic' aspects of our lives.¹⁸ In attempting to

¹⁴ Recent studies on specific clothing, fashion and luxury trades include for example: Giorgio Riello *A Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands-Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum in association with the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996). See also Michael Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987).

¹⁵ See for example Riello, *A Foot in the Past*.

¹⁶ See Jules David Prown, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17/1 (1982), 1-19 (pp. 1-2); Karen Harvey, 'Introduction', in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. by Karen Harvey (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1-26 (pp. 3-4).

¹⁷ Harvey, 'Introduction', p. 5.

¹⁸ Anne Gerritsen and Riello, 'Introduction' in *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. by Anne Gerritsen and Riello (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 1-13 (p. 2).

understand the significance of clothing in a different period to our own, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass encourage us to ‘undo our own social categories’ and to understand the ability of clothing to shape the social experience of the wearer and its power as ‘material memories’.¹⁹ For Jones and Stallybrass, clothing is quite literally ‘a world of social relations put upon the wearer’s body.’²⁰ These paradigms are useful for considering the materiality of embroidery, not least because of the shifting meanings which embroidery encompassed throughout the eighteenth century.

As Adrienne Hood has recognised, the object source can be analysed on both a micro and macro level, the former necessitating a detailed analysis of the objects on a physical level, whilst the latter entails a consideration of its wider contextual meanings.²¹ Scholarship on embroidery has, appropriately, focused closely on the objects themselves. Starting with the object and working outwards can be a useful exercise which can reveal a variety of meanings and lead us to ask important questions of the objects. Indeed, a close analysis of embroidered clothing enables us first and foremost to assess the materiality of embroidery; its texture, pattern, size and weight, for example. How did embroidery feel to the wearer and what did its ownership suggest to both the owner and others? Engaging with the object also furthers our understanding of the embroidery techniques used and the construction of the garment. How difficult was it to embroider in materials with varying physical properties such as gold, silver, silk and spangles? What level of skill did certain techniques entail and how long did it take to embroider a waistcoat in silk compared to one in gold?

Nevertheless, there are limitations in relying solely on object sources to provide an accurate and fair representation of the embroidery trade. What does survive can be incomplete or in a fragile state. Expensive trimmings such as embroidery, for example, were often removed and re-used for other items. Surviving objects are not necessarily representative of all embroidery during this period and one must proceed with caution to avoid making generalisations. Furthermore, the object by itself cannot explain the consumer-producer relationship or the wider economic context of the trade. Nor is it

¹⁹ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹ Adrienne D. Hood, ‘Material Culture: The Object’, in *History Beyond Text: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. by Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 176-98 (p. 180).

appropriate to rely solely on archival evidence, which itself can be fragmentary and can obscure the evidence found in the physical objects by way of bias, incomplete or missing information. This thesis does not, therefore, use the object source in the same way that an art historian or anthropologist would, for example. Whereas the object would be used in these disciplines as the primary material evidence of a society's culture or beliefs, I use the object source as evidence alongside written documents. In my analysis, the object source enhances our understanding of the written material, and vice versa. The two, I argue, cannot be considered in isolation.²²

Material culture studies thus provides an appropriate framework for arriving at a more nuanced analysis of embroidery because of the wide range of sources which this methodology incorporates and the flexibility that this allows. This thesis utilises written sources such as account books, correspondence, the periodical and fashion press, and guild records to consider the broader economic and social context of the embroidered objects. Visual culture is further useful for understanding how embroidered clothing was worn and represented, but this too comes with its limitations and care must be taken to recognise the viewpoint of the artist and the intentions of the sitter.

Textile, fashion and dress history are further useful frameworks for engaging with the history of the embroidery trade. Studies in these disciplines have long acknowledged that the cut of dress during the eighteenth century evolved slowly, and that it was the decoration or trimming which was used to render an outfit fashionable.²³ It is therefore surprising that whilst research has been carried out on changing textile patterns, few studies have made trimmings – and the ancillary trades which produced them – the focus of their research. Textile production, on the other hand, has attracted greater attention, with important research on silk and cotton transforming our understanding of the industries which produced these lengths of fabric which were transformed into garments.²⁴ For France, the work of Alain Cottureau, Carlo Poni and Lesley Ellis Miller,

²² In this respect I follow Hood's methodology, in which she suggests that 'there must be a symbiotic relationship' between written and material evidence. See *ibid.*, p. 187.

²³ Cissie Fairchild, 'The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 228-48 (p. 238).

²⁴ See for example: Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Pasold Research Fund, 1991); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For

has elucidated our understanding of the Lyonnais silk industry and provides an important foundation for considering the production of embroidery, which itself was closely linked to the silk industry in Lyon.²⁵

The field of fashion theory has been greatly influenced by the work of sociological theorists such as Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu, whose theoretical frameworks are important for understanding fashion within the sociological context of group and individual identity. Veblen's 'conspicuous consumption' has been an influential concept for many studies of fashion and consumption, a concept which considers the excessive consumption of expensive and luxury goods to be motivated by the desire to maintain or

France specifically, William Reddy's work on the French cotton industries approaches the study of textiles through the lens of economic history. See William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture: The Textile Trade and French Society 1750-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²⁵ On the Lyon silk industry during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see for example: Alain Cottureau, 'The Silk Industries of Lyon and London, 1800-1850', in *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization*, ed. by Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 75-152; Carlo Poni, 'Fashion as Flexible Production: The Strategies of the Lyons Silk Merchants in the Eighteenth Century', in *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization*, ed. by Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 37-74. The work of Lesley Ellis Miller is particularly important for understanding silk design and manufacture within the broader context of fashion and consumption. See for example: Lesley E. Miller, 'Jean Revel: Silk Designer, Fine Artist or Entrepreneur?', *Journal of Design History*, 8/2 (1996), 79-96; Miller, 'Paris-Lyon-Paris: Dialogue in the Design and Distribution of Patterned Silks in the 18th Century', *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce*, ed. by Robert Fox and Anthony Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 139-67; Miller, 'Innovation and Industrial Espionage in Eighteenth-Century France: An Investigation of the Selling of Silks through Samples', *Journal of Design History*, 12/3 (1999), 271-92; Miller, 'Representing Silk Design: Nicolas Joubert de l'Hiberderie and *Le dessinateur pour les étoffes d'or, d'argent et de soie* (Paris, 1765)', *Journal of Design History*, 17/1 (2004), 29-53; Miller, 'The Marriage of Art and Commerce: Philippe De Lasalle's Success in Silk', *Art history*, 28/2 (2005), 200-26; Miller, 'La culture de la manufacture: les marchands fabricants', in *Lyon au XVIII^e siècle: Un siècle surprenant!*, ed. by M. Privat-Savigny (Lyon: Musées Gadagne/Somogy, 2012), pp. 109-21; Miller, *Selling Silks: A Merchant's Sample Book 1764* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014); Miller, *Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century French Silk Designers* (Pasold Research Fund, 2015).

advance social position, rather than out of necessity.²⁶ Bourdieu views fashion as being inherent in systems of class distinction and served to perpetuate such boundaries.²⁷ The work of Norbert Elias has provided a useful theoretical framework in which to study the fashionable consumption of the court, in which Elias has attributed the nobility's need to consume luxury items appropriate to their rank in order to maintain or advance social position. More recently, Giora Sternberg has argued for a more nuanced approach to the study of the struggle for distinction at court, suggesting that noble men and women had a greater degree of agency than has hitherto been allowed for in studies of court society.²⁸

Closely-related to fashion theory is the field of dress history, a methodological tool which is useful for examining the significance of clothing. Until the 1980s, those who practised dress history were, for the most part, museum professionals whose research focused on a detailed examination of artefacts, and who took a 'connoisseurial approach' in their analysis of clothing.²⁹ However, the social and cultural significance of clothing makes the study of garments a useful form of analysis for many academic disciplines and in recent years dress history has benefited from a range of multi-disciplinary approaches.³⁰ Moving away from an exclusive object-based analysis, dress history as a field has diversified to use garments as primary sources for interrogating their wider social, cultural and political context.³¹ Economic historians such as Negley Harte, Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, however, were sceptical about the methodological approach of dress history,

²⁶ Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925).

²⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1989).

²⁸ Giora Sternberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁹ Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin, 'Introduction: Material Strategies Engendered', in *Material Strategies: Dress and Gender in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin (Malden, Oxford and Berlin: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), pp. 1-11 (p. 2).

³⁰ Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester and New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 1-2. See also Charlotte Nicklas and Annebella Pollen, eds, *Dress History: New Directions in Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

³¹ Elizabeth Wilson and Amy de la Haye, 'Introduction', in *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity*, ed. by Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

with Fine and Leopold once denouncing the field as ‘wholly descriptive’.³² By contrast, economic historians were primarily interested in the study of the textiles which made up the garments of the dress historian’s attention. Focusing on how clothing was produced and retailed, their use of archival documents such as manuscript sources interrogated the supply side of clothing, rather than the demand side. Yet as John Styles has noted, many of these studies ‘concluded at the textile factory gate.’³³ However, the divergence between dress and economic and social history has been bridged in recent years by historians who have used a range of interdisciplinary methodologies to situate clothing and dress within its broader historical context. Dress historians, such as Aileen Ribeiro and Anne Buck for example, have successfully combined object-based analysis with visual and literary sources.³⁴ This move towards a multi-disciplinary approach to dress history has been partly due to a focus on consumption rather than production.³⁵ In particular, research by historians such as Christopher Breward, Beverly Lemire, Daniel Roche and Styles has highlighted the significance of dress in arriving at a deeper understanding of eighteenth-century society and cultural change over time.³⁶ Using a range of social and economic frameworks, combined with a traditional dress history approach, these studies have opened up the field to interrogate the ‘bigger’ historical debates concerning social structures, patterns of consumption and production. Such research has paved the way for the development of a ‘new dress history’.³⁷

³² Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, *The World of Consumption*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 94. See also Negley B. Harte, ‘The Economics of Clothing in the Late Seventeenth Century’, *Textile History*, 22/2 (1991), 277-96.

³³ John Styles, ‘Dress in History: Reflections on a Contested Terrain’, *Fashion Theory*, 2/1 (1998), 383-92 (p. 384).

³⁴ See for example: Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750-1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. See also Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1979).

³⁵ Styles, ‘Dress in History: Reflections on a Contested Terrain’.

³⁶ See for example: Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*; Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*; Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁷ Valerie Cumming considers the work of Breward, Lemire and Roche, among others, as being influential in the development of a ‘new’ scholarship on dress and fashion history which has

Consumption and Luxury

Scholarship over the past thirty years has transformed our understanding of consumption and commerce in eighteenth-century society. It has argued that a 'consumer revolution' occurred during this period which profoundly changed the rate at which men and women accumulated goods.³⁸ A broader section of society purchased and owned a greater variety of goods than ever before and historians have shown that consumption in France dramatically increased over the course of the eighteenth century. In this context, the work of Roche on clothing has been particularly important, as it demonstrates that a preoccupation with fashion at all levels of society led to what he terms a 'clothing revolution'.³⁹ Furthermore, Cissie Fairchilds has attributed the French 'consumer revolution' to the wider availability of 'populuxe' or 'semi-luxury' items which imitated

emerged since the 1990s. See Valerie Cumming, *Understanding Fashion History* (London: Batsford, 2004), pp. 38-9.

³⁸ Historians have built up a discourse surrounding the economic and social development of European societies in the eighteenth century, in which it has become widely accepted that a marked increase in consumption and production occurred. The term 'consumer revolution' has been conceptualised in a variety of different ways. See for example: Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Historians such as Colin Campbell and Lorna Weatherill have since set forth more nuanced arguments to explain the drive in consumer behaviour during the eighteenth century. See for example: Colin Campbell, 'Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England: A Character-Action Approach', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 40-57; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

³⁹ Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century*, trans. Marie Evans (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987); Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*; Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

expensive luxury objects such as fans, umbrellas and watches, and which were enthusiastically consumed by the lower classes in eighteenth-century urban France.⁴⁰

This eighteenth-century 'world of goods' encompassed textiles, fashionable accessories, furniture, porcelain and even exotic foodstuffs. In particular, it was characterised by novel goods and cheaper imitations of luxury items.⁴¹ The so-called 'new luxuries' have been identified as the catalyst for innovation, changes in production methods, and the development of industry across eighteenth-century Europe.⁴² Yet a 'consumer revolution' based solely on the consumption of new goods is limited in its scope for understanding the place that traditional, expensive and bespoke products continued to hold alongside the cheaper novelties of the eighteenth century.⁴³ Generally

⁴⁰ Cissie Fairchild, 'The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris'. Fairchild's work on religion and consumerism has also demonstrated the importance of counter-reformation Catholicism in the growth of urban consumption, particularly of small religious objects and images. See Fairchild, 'Marketing the Counter-Reformation: Religious Objects and Consumerism in Early Modern France', *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. by Christine Adams, Jack R. Censer and Lisa Jane Graham (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 31-58. On French consumption during the eighteenth century, see also Michael Kwass, 'Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France', *Representations*, 82/1 (2003), 87-116.

⁴¹ Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 9.

⁴² Jan de Vries, 'Luxury and the Golden Age in Theory and Practice', in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 41-56. See also Berg and Helen Clifford, eds, *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999). The work of Styles has greatly enhanced our understanding of product innovation and its contribution to the development of a consumer society in early modern England. See for example Styles, 'Product Innovation in Early Modern London', *Past & Present*, 168 (2000), 124-69.

⁴³ The recent edited volume by Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart has made an important step towards recognising the continuation of existing products alongside new products. See Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart, 'Introduction', in *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century: Comparative Perspectives from Western Europe*, ed. by Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1-12 (pp. 8-10).

referred to as the ‘old’ luxuries, these were goods which were associated with the extravagant spending habits of the nobility and excessive displays of aristocratic ostentation.⁴⁴ This dichotomy of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury cannot satisfactorily categorise embroidery. By the late eighteenth century, embroidery was at the same time both ‘old’ and ‘new’ with an enduring appeal as a luxury embellishment for a wide range of elite consumers. An example of ‘old’ luxury was the significant amounts of money which continued to be spent on embroidered clothing in precious materials, such as gold and silver, for formal appearances at court throughout the eighteenth century. In parallel, a category of ‘fashionable’ embroidery emerged and was purchased by this same clientele and others who sought to engage with the fashions – or the so-called ‘new’ luxuries – of the day.⁴⁵

The concept of an eighteenth-century ‘consumer revolution’ has also privileged one type of consumer. Scholarship has tended to focus on the middling class consumer and, to a lesser extent, the consumption habits of the plebeian classes.⁴⁶ This focus was a response to previous scholarship that had concentrated on the higher echelons of society. Historians have paid less attention to the consumption habits of the elite, denouncing their excessive expenditure on luxury as mere ostentation. Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognise that the spending habits of the nobility sustained the luxury trades of Paris until the end of the *ancien régime*, and that these luxury trades were an integral part of the economy of eighteenth-century France.⁴⁷ The consumption habits of the elites, however, are gradually being foregrounded. The work of scholars such as Roche, Natacha Coquery and Carolyn Sargentson for France, and Hannah Greig for England, has made an important contribution to our understanding of the spending habits of the nobility.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ de Vries, ‘Luxury and the Golden Age in Theory and Practice’.

⁴⁵ These differences will be examined at length in Chapter 1.

⁴⁶ See for example Styles, *The Dress of the People*; Styles, ‘Involuntary Consumers? Servants and their Clothes in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Textile History*, 33/1 (2002), 9-21.

⁴⁷ Sonenscher argues that the luxury trades were ‘one of the most substantial components of the eighteenth-century urban economy.’ Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 212.

⁴⁸ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*; Natacha Coquery, ‘The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris’, *Journal of Design History*, 17/1 (2004), 71-90; Coquery, *L’Hôtel aristocratique: le marché du luxe à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998); Sargentson *Merchants and Luxury Markets*; Sargentson, ‘The

However, scholarship to date has not fully investigated the effects of such consumption on the smaller luxury trades of eighteenth-century France. It has tended to focus on innovation – whether product or process – which has obscured those trades which continued to adhere to tradition, not embracing mechanisation or technological innovation.

The nobles were important consumers of luxury products in the eighteenth century, yet they made up the minority of French society during this period and were by no means a homogenous group.⁴⁹ Noble status, whilst traditionally inherited, could also be attained through marriage, the purchase of a title, or granted by the king. The various ways in which individuals could obtain status and wealth resulted in a highly stratified nobility which consisted of a series of administrative and political sub-groups, from the sword (inherited nobility) to the robe (noble status granted by the king) to the newly ennobled, and the army. The nobility was also an extremely mobile group, moving regularly between the court at Versailles and the cosmopolitan city of Paris. This was the case even more so after the death of Louis XIV, when court life was interrupted during the Regency period and then brought back again under Louis XV, whilst it was challenged during the reign of Louis XVI.⁵⁰ Such economic and social nuances within the nobility, and their geographic dispersal throughout the city and over the course of the eighteenth century, meant that individuals were motivated to distinguish their identity through ‘visual

Manufacture and Marketing of Luxury Goods: the *Marchands Merciers* of Late 17th- and 18th-Century Paris’, in *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce*, ed. by Robert Fox and Anthony Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 99-137; Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ On the French nobility, see for example Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: from Feudalism to Enlightenment*, trans. William Doyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993); Sharon Kettering, *French Society, 1589-1715* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); William Doyle, ed., *Old Regime France, 1648-1788* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Roger Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

⁵⁰ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 76.

symbols of rank'.⁵¹ This included the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods such as clothing, furnishings, and even food.

By the mid-eighteenth century, a new urban and commercial life in Paris was emerging in parallel with the traditional court life of Versailles, and with it, an evolving culture of consumption which centred around the luxury markets of eighteenth-century Paris. The public's consumption of fashion and luxury preoccupied many contemporary social commentators. Writers who wrote on the subject of luxury debated the moral implications of the growing consumption of luxury goods on both sides of the Channel. The publication of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* in 1714 was one of the main turning points in social and economic thought, when luxury began to be seen as advantageous to the national economy.⁵² Mandeville argued, on the contrary to the moralists, that the individual's pursuit of self-interest (and his consumption of luxury) was in fact essential to the greater good of society and national prosperity. In France, political economists and philosophers such as Jacques Savary, Jean-François Melon and Montesquieu wrote extensively on the subject. In *Le parfait négociant* (1675) for example, Savary saw luxury positively and in terms of prospering commercial trade. In these debates, the 'new' luxuries, which were consumed by the middling classes, were seen as distinct from the 'old' luxuries which were associated with excessive spending and the ostentatious excess of the nobility. The 'new' luxury, by contrast, was aligned with principles of rational spending and came to be seen in terms of economic advantage. Later political economists such as David Hume and Adam Smith aligned luxury with commerce and convenience.⁵³

⁵¹ Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 86.

⁵² Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. by F. B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924). Mandeville's text was translated into French in 1740. For an examination of its reception in France, see Elena Muceni, 'Mandeville and France: The Reception of *The Fable of the Bees* in France and its Influence on the French Enlightenment', *French Studies*, 69/5 (2015), 449-61.

⁵³ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 32-3. For the secondary literature on the eighteenth-century luxury debates, see for example: Berg and Eger, 'The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates', in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, pp. 7-27; Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore and London: Johns

Yet the ‘old’ luxuries associated with court clothing continued to be consumed in parallel to the ‘new’ luxuries which were distributed via the *marchands merciers* of Paris, complicating a straightforward dichotomy of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury when considering the consumption habits of the elite. Codes of etiquette dictated the appearance of ceremonial dress which was required for formal court events, with little room for expression of the changing ‘fashions’ or ‘new’ luxuries.

Fashion and Taste

There exists an extensive body of scholarship on French fashions which is unsurprising given the prominence of France as a leader of European fashion during the eighteenth century. The work of dress historians such as Madeleine Delpierre in particular has made an important contribution to our understanding of fashionable clothing items in eighteenth-century France.⁵⁴ Unlike in the general history of consumption, the focus on the elites in the history of dress has never diminished. The strong influence of the French monarchy has encouraged many studies in this field to concentrate on the fashions of the court, and so this thesis benefits from the work of historians such as Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset, Coquery, Clare Haru Crowston, Pascale Gorguet-Ballesteros and Philip Mansell.⁵⁵ The influence of the French court on European fashion has long been

Hopkins University Press, 1977); John Shovlin, ‘The Cultural Politics of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France’, *French Historical Studies*, 23/4 (2000), 577-606.

⁵⁴ See for example Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*; Delpierre, Jacques Ruppert, Renée Davrat-Piécolek and Pascale Gorguet-Ballesteros, *Le costume français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996). See also Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*; Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. Earlier works on French fashions include: Jules-Etienne Joseph Quicherat, *Histoire du costume en France depuis les temps le plus reculés jusqu’à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1875); Albert Charles Auguste Racinet, *Le costume historique: Cinq cents planches, trois cents en couleurs, or et argent, deux cents en camaieu; Types principaux du vêtement et de la parure, rapprochés de ceux de l’intérieur de l’habitation dans tous les temps et chez tous peuples, avec de nombreux détails sur le mobilier, les armes, les objets usuels, les moyens de transport, etc.*, 6 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1888).

⁵⁵ Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset, *L’Esprit des modes au Grand Siècle* (Paris: Editions du CTHS, 2010); Thépaut-Cabasset, ‘Le service de la garde-robe: une création de Louis XIV’, in *Fastes de cour et cérémonies royales: Le costume de cour en Europe 1650-1800*, ed. by Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel and Pascale Gorguet-Ballesteros (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2009), pp. 28-33; Coquery, ‘La diffusion du luxe à la fin de l’ancien régime: Les boutiquiers parisiens entre la cour

acknowledged.⁵⁶ Dress historians such as Diana de Marly have traditionally held up Louis XIV as the arbiter of fashion and have generally attributed France's success as the leader of European fashion to the Sun King's personal influence.⁵⁷ However, scholarship over the past twenty years has moved away from this perception and historians such as Crowston, Jennifer M. Jones and DeJean have highlighted the contribution of many other actors to the creation and dissemination of fashion.⁵⁸ Furthermore, historians such as Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell and Katherine Norberg have argued that the court was not as divorced from fashion as has generally been suggested, and that a certain interdependency between fashion and the court existed.⁵⁹ Their work has shown that formal court wear was to a certain extent influenced by changes in fashionable taste. This study echoes such scholarship and views fashion as being closely linked to notions of collective social identity.

et la ville', in *Fastes de cour et cérémonies royales*, pp. 216-21; Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, 'Le grand habit et la mode en France au XVIIIe siècle', in *Fastes de cour et cérémonies royales*, pp. 222-25; Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2013); Pascale Gorguet-Ballesteros, 'Caractériser le costume de cour', in *Fastes de cour et cérémonies royales*, pp. 54-71; Gorguet-Ballesteros, 'Petite étude du grand habit à travers les mémoires quittances de la comtesse d'Artois (1771 – 1780)', in *Se vêtir à la cour en Europe (1400 – 1815)*, ed. by Natacha Coquery and Isabelle Paresys (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Université Lille 3 - Charles-de-Gaulle, 2011), pp. 197-212; Philip Mansell, *Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). On elite French fashions during the long eighteenth century, see also Hélène Himelfarb, 'Versailles, source ou miroir des modes Louis-quatorziennes? Souches et Dangeau, 1684-1685', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 38 (1986), 121-43; Diana de Marly, *Louis XIV and Versailles* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987).

⁵⁶ See for example Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*; Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1988); Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*.

⁵⁷ de Marly, *Louis XIV and Versailles*.

⁵⁸ Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004); DeJean, *The Essence of Style: How the French invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*; Kathryn Norberg, 'Louis XIV: King of Fashion?', in *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV: Interpreting the Art of Elegance*, ed. by Kathryn Norberg and Sandra Rosenbaum (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014), pp. 135-65.

Scholarship on taste and taste-making in the eighteenth century has tended to focus on the demand-side and has promoted the role of the consumer in shaping notions of taste. In studies of embroidery, the figures of the consumer, designer and merchant have rarely been considered in parallel, if they have been fully considered. This thesis argues that their interdependency was essential to the process of designing and making a fashionable product, and that we should not consider each in isolation. Rather, the written correspondence exchanged across their overlapping networks created a shared understanding of what constituted ‘good taste’ in embroidery.

Whilst historians such as Leora Auslander and Katie Scott have highlighted the role of the consumer in the design process of the most capital intensive luxury trades of eighteenth-century France, few studies have focused on the smaller, ancillary trades of the luxury market.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the work of Sargentson on the *marchands merciers* of eighteenth-century Paris has highlighted the need to look beyond producers and consumers in the formation of fashion, style and taste. The *marchands merciers*, whose expertise lay in retailing and marketing rather than artisanal production, had an essential role in the luxury markets of eighteenth-century Paris by supplying an elite clientele with a range of new and fashionable goods from across France, Europe and Asia.⁶¹ Moreover, Miller has examined the producer-consumer relationship and critically assessed the dialogue between Paris and Lyon, again within the context of eighteenth-century silk design. Miller’s research has challenged the tendency to view Paris and Lyon, and Lyonnais designers, in isolation, arguing for the creation of silk design as a joint process of negotiation between producer and consumer.⁶² This thesis aims to extend the debate and add to such research by interrogating specifically how taste was communicated between consumers, designers and merchants. It concentrates primarily on the communication of tasteful ideas between these groups of people. An examination of the communication of taste between different groups of actors within the embroidery trade provides a more connected story of taste, in which it becomes apparent that the primacy of Paris as the centre of taste formation requires reassessment.

⁶⁰ See for example Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*; Scott, *The Rococo Interior*.

⁶¹ Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*.

⁶² Miller, ‘Paris-Lyon-Paris: Dialogue in the Design and Distribution of Patterned Silks in the 18th Century’.

Retailing Luxury

The concepts of fashion and taste, and the relationship between Paris and Lyon, necessitate an engagement with the practical ways in which luxury goods were bought and sold during the eighteenth century. The increased consumption of luxury and semi-luxury goods and a growing preoccupation with fashion have long been recognised as features of early modern European society. Studies in the history of retailing have demonstrated that a close examination of shops, shopping, advertising and marketing during the eighteenth century can elucidate a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the consumption and production of these goods.⁶³ Not only do such studies focus on the spaces of retailing, but also on the cultural and social practices embedded within the systems of retailing. Located at a site in between these two activities, retailing and shopping played an important role in the development of a consumer society during this period.

To date, much of the work that has been undertaken on retailing in the eighteenth century has focused on Britain.⁶⁴ Yet there is a growing body of research that has begun to illuminate the practices of buying and selling, particularly in the luxury markets, of

⁶³ See for example the recent volume by Blondé and Stobart, eds, *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century*.

⁶⁴ There is a large body of scholarship on retailing and shopping in England during the eighteenth century. See for example: Nancy Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550–1820* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); Cox, *Retailing and the Language of Goods, 1550–1820* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997); Claire Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in England and North America, 1700–1830*, ed. by John Styles and Amanda Vickery (London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 151–77; Helen Berry, 'Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 375–94; Serena Dyer, 'Shopping and the Senses: Retail, Browsing and Consumption in 18th-Century England', *History Compass* 12 (2014), 694–703; Rachel Ramsey, 'Buying and Selling Luxury in Seventeenth-Century England', *The Eighteenth Century* 51/1–2 (2010), 245–49; Stobart, 'Shopping Streets as Social Space: Consumerism, Improvement and Leisure in an Eighteenth-Century County Town', *Urban History*, 25/1 (1998), 3–21; Stobart, 'Gentlemen and Shopkeepers: Supplying the Country House in Eighteenth-Century England', *Economic History Review* 64/3 (2011), 885–904.

eighteenth-century France.⁶⁵ The work of Coquery, for example, has made an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the luxury markets of eighteenth-century Paris and the wider impact of luxury and semi-luxury retailing on the French economy during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶⁶ In particular, her work on the marketing of semi-luxury goods in eighteenth-century Paris has highlighted the importance of the role of the shopkeeper in shaping new modes of consuming, particularly through their use of advertising.⁶⁷ Sargentson has highlighted the speed and creativity with which the *marchands merciers* were able to satisfy the ever-evolving consumer demand for novelty through the use of various marketing strategies and the latest technological innovations that the period had to offer.⁶⁸ DeJean has investigated how the shopping experience in late seventeenth-century Paris was revolutionised by the development of luxury shopping boutiques and has shown how the creation of luxurious shops went hand-in-hand with the development of novel forms of advertising. Alongside new forms of print promotion, merchants were encouraged to create an equally new shopping experience for their customers, through a variety of techniques such as display, interiors and, crucially, the separation of the workshop from the space in which the produced goods were sold.⁶⁹ More recently, Thépaut-Cabasset has noted the importance of the periodical press in France to the rise of innovative retailing in late seventeenth-century Paris. Through a case-study analysis of the *marchand mercier* Francois I. Gaultier, Thépaut-Cabasset has shown how Gaultier's reputation as a high-end retailer was enhanced through his frequent inclusion in the pages of the *Mercure galant*, the author of

⁶⁵ See for example: Stéphane Castelluccio, ed., *Le commerce du luxe à Paris aux XVII et XVIIIe siècle* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009); Guillaume Glorieux, *A l'enseigne de Gersaint: Edme-François Gersaint, marchand d'art sur le pont Notre Dame (1694-1750)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2002).

⁶⁶ Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique*.

⁶⁷ Coquery, 'The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris'. See also Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique*.

⁶⁸ See Sargentson *Merchants and Luxury Markets*; Sargentson, 'The Manufacture and Marketing of Luxury Goods: the *Marchands Merciers* of Late 17th- and 18th-Century Paris'.

⁶⁹ DeJean, 'Shops of Gold: Advertising Luxury in Seventeenth-Century Paris', *Luxury*, 1/2014, 23-46.

which consistently celebrated his stocking of the latest and highest quality materials used for clothing the king and queen.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, most scholarship on retailing in eighteenth-century France has focused on the activities of the *marchands merciers* rather than specific trades. An exception is recent research on the role of other major towns in France during this period, and on the retailing practices specific to particular industries. The work of Miller for example, has enhanced our understanding of the retailing and distribution practices specific to the Lyonnais silk industry. Miller has demonstrated that the success of the Lyonnais silk merchants and manufacturers was in part due to the role of travelling salesmen and the use of material samples as a marketing tool to facilitate long-distance selling.⁷¹

History of Production and Guilds

The prominence of the luxury and fashion industries in eighteenth-century France must be situated within the broader context of production and the guild system. Until the second half of the twentieth century, scholarship characterised traditional small production units in the pre-industrial era as ‘backwards’ and resistant to innovation. In choosing to focus instead on the trajectories of large manufacturers and mass production as the success story of industrial progress and a country’s economic growth, such studies neglected to account for the dynamism of small producers.⁷² However, the work of historians from the 1980s onwards recognised the importance of small producers as an alternative to mass production.⁷³ Such studies have changed our understanding of the

⁷⁰ Thépaut-Cabasset, ‘A Glittering Reputation: Gaultier’s Retailing Innovations in Seventeenth-Century Paris’, in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles and Innovation in Europe 1500-1800*, ed. by Evelyn Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Pasold Research Fund, 2017), pp. 169-85.

⁷¹ See for example Miller, ‘Material Marketing: How Lyonnais Silk Manufacturers Sold Silks, 1660-1789’, in *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century*, pp. 85-98; Miller, ‘Innovation and Industrial Espionage in Eighteenth-Century France: An Investigation of the Selling of Silks through Samples’.

⁷² The importance of smaller producers has been foregrounded by Berg. See for example Berg, ‘Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Business History* 35 (1993), 17-39.

⁷³ Berg, Pat Hudson and Michael Sonenscher, eds, *Manufacture in Town and Country Before the Factory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Berg, ed., *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe* (London: Routledge, 1991); Berg, ed., *The Age of Manufactures: Industry, Innovation*

pre-industrial production landscape, demonstrating that small producers co-existed with larger manufacturers and that the two should not be seen as opposites in the path towards economic development. Rather, the multifaceted nature of urban production was necessary in order to serve the different needs of various consumers, who demanded products which required a range of materials, technology and skill. Revisionist scholarship has further shown that technological and product innovation was achieved during this period through the interdependency of small artisans and large-scale manufacturers.⁷⁴ Further still, that the craft economy was ‘complex, highly flexible, and very dynamic.’⁷⁵

Subcontracting in particular was a highly flexible form of organisation which enabled producers to respond quickly to the changes in consumer demand which were rife during the eighteenth century. Many recent studies have demonstrated its importance in the organisation of production, particularly within the luxury trades of eighteenth-century London and Paris which consisted of small concentrated units of production amongst skilled artisans.⁷⁶ The practice of subcontracting further highlights the

and Work in Britain, 1700–1820 (London: Routledge, 1994); Charles F. Sabel, and Jonathan Zeitlin, ‘Historical Alternatives to Mass Production’, *Past & Present* 108 (August 1985), 133-76; Sabel and Zeitlin, eds, *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ See for example Berg, ‘Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England’. Berg’s work on the metal trades of Birmingham and Sheffield shows that the division of labour and close networking between production units enabled producers to fine-tune their production processes to achieve technological improvement whilst avoiding high costs such as overheads and extensive inventories.

⁷⁵ James R. Farr, ‘On the Shop Floor: Guilds, Artisans, and the European Market Economy, 1350–1750’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1 (1997), 24-54 (p. 33).

⁷⁶ For the literature on the various trades of England see Styles, ‘The Goldsmiths and the London Trades, 1550-1750’, in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skills, 1550–1750*, ed. by David Mitchell (Stroud: Alan Sutton and Centre for Metropolitan History, 1995), pp. 112-20; Helen Clifford, ‘“The King’s Arms and Feathers”. A Case Study exploring the Networks of Manufacture Operating in the London Goldsmiths’ Trade in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers*, pp. 84-95; Clifford, ‘Making Luxuries: The Image and Reality of Luxury Workshops in 18th-Century London’, in *The Vernacular Workshop: From Craft to Industry, 1400-1900*, ed. by P. A. Barnwell, Marilyn Palmer, and Malcolm Airs (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2004), pp. 17-27; Clifford, *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Berg, ed., *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century*

increasingly specialised skillset of individual artisans, many of whom chose to concentrate their talents in a specific area of their trade. From the seventeenth century onwards, it was not uncommon to find specific products which had been completed through the work and contribution of different artisans.⁷⁷ In his work on the Paris luxury trades, Michael Sonenscher ventured that ‘none of the elaborately ornate objects produced in eighteenth-century France was made in one place by one pair of hands.’⁷⁸ Sonenscher suggests that the subcontracting systems put in place by the guilds were essential to their efficacy in meeting consumer demand for luxury goods. Riello proposes that subcontracting was not necessarily a cost-reducing measure, but was rather a response to new modes of consuming and the changing social structure of artisanal life.⁷⁹ To date, scholarship on embroidery has not fully explored how production was organised within the trade. This thesis will investigate how subcontracting was organised in the embroidery trade and the extent to which it was an effective system for meeting a varied consumer demand for embroidery.

Complicated subcontracting networks were in operation throughout the eighteenth century, notwithstanding the existence of guilds. In France, the guild system attempted to regulate production processes and organisation, as well as training, in order to preserve the high level of quality for which French luxury products were renowned, although this system became less effective from the end of the seventeenth century onwards.⁸⁰ A key feature of the pre-industrial landscape of early modern Europe, the guild

Britain, pp. 168-9. For France, see: Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France*; Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*; Steven L. Kaplan, ‘The Luxury Guilds in Paris in the Eighteenth Century’, *Francia*, 9 (1981), 257–95; Fairchild, ‘The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris’; Cottureau, ‘The Fate of Collective Manufactures in the Industrial World: the Silk Industries of Lyons and London, 1800-1850’; Pierre Claude Reynard, ‘Manufacturing Strategies in the Eighteenth Century: Subcontracting for Growth among Papermakers in the Auvergne’, *Journal of Economic History*, 58/1 (1998), 155-182. For a comparative study of the shoemaking trade in England and France see Riello, *A Foot in the Past*.

⁷⁷ Farr, ‘On the Shop Floor: Guilds, Artisans, and the European Market Economy, 1350–1750’, pp. 35-6.

⁷⁸ Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, p. 214.

⁷⁹ Riello, ‘Strategies and Boundaries: Subcontracting and the London Trades in the Long Eighteenth Century’, *Enterprise & Society*, 9/2 (2008), 243-80.

⁸⁰ The guild system of eighteenth-century France will be examined in Chapter 4.

system was particularly prominent in France, where guilds dominated urban working life from the Middle Ages up until their demise in 1791. In particular, guilds were highly visible during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the major cities of France, especially in Paris and Lyon, the two cities on which this thesis concentrates. During the reign of Louis XIV, the appointment of Jean-Baptiste Colbert as Minister of Finance in 1665 marked a new era in the economic and commercial history of France. Colbert placed great emphasis on state intervention in order to build a prosperous nation, and a highly-regulated guild system was integral to his mercantilist agenda. The guild system is central to understanding the success of France as a leader of fashion during this period and thus is an important consideration for this thesis' analysis of embroidery production.

Up until the 1980s, scholarship took the prevailing view that the guild system was economically regressive, stifled innovation, and hindered economic and social progress. Yet if this was the case, it is surprising that such an institutionalised system was able to not only survive almost 600 years, but also hold such a prominent and revered position in pre-industrial France. It is this peculiarity that led historians in the 1980s to examine the positive contribution of the guilds to not only the progress of the economy and technical innovation, but also as an intrinsic part of the social order of urban working life in French towns and cities.⁸¹ Steven L. Kaplan for example, argued that the guilds were part of an effective system which contributed to the French economy through promoting national product quality and regulating the order and conduct of its workers.

Nevertheless, conservative views continued even in the face of new approaches to guild histories. Historians such as Liana Vardi maintained that the guilds had no legitimate place in the new political context which was to follow the Revolution, and that

⁸¹ See S. R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, eds, *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Pre-Industrial Europe' in *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, pp. 684-713; Michael P. Fitzsimmons, *From Artisan to Worker: Guilds, the French State, and the Organization of Labor, 1776-1821* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Kaplan, 'The Luxury Guilds in Paris in the 18th Century'; Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question 1700-1775* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Sonenscher, 'Journeyman, the Courts and the French Trades 1781-1791', *Past & Present*, 114 (February 1987), 77-109; Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France*; Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*; Sonenscher, 'Work and Wages in Paris in the Eighteenth Century' in *Manufacture in Town and Country before the Factory*, pp. 147-72.

they were anachronistic and an outmoded economic feature of the *ancien régime*.⁸² For Fairchilds too, the revisionist version of guild history, which propounded that the guild system in France was compatible with economic expansion and a growing consumer society, is problematic. The guild system, Fairchilds argues, was a hindrance to commercial capitalism by restricting the ability of artisans and retailers to respond to the growing consumer demand for novelty.⁸³ Moreover, Sheilagh Ogilvie argues that the fact that the guild system was able to survive for such a long time should not be taken as indicative of a system which was either economically successful or progressive. Rather, the continuation of such a system impaired economic efficiency, as well as quality and innovation.⁸⁴

Scholarship has shown that illicit, clandestine or underground production was widespread during the early modern period and operated in parallel to guild-regulated activity.⁸⁵ The privileged areas (*fauxbourgs privilégiés*) of Paris, such as the Faubourg Saint-Antoine granted certain freedoms to artisans to practise their trades away from guild regulation. Guilds discouraged their workers from residing in these areas and masters were generally forbidden from employing the services of these non-guild workers.⁸⁶

The issue of non-guild workers in the embroidery trade highlights the gender bias which clandestine or illicit production necessarily entailed. This bias is exacerbated further when applied to female workers, since archival documents promote the visibility of male (and guild) workers. Studies of women and work in early modern Europe have shown that women actively participated in the market economy.⁸⁷ They have demonstrated that

⁸² Liana Vardi, 'The Abolition of the Guilds during the French Revolution', *French Historical Studies*, 15/4 (1988), 704-17.

⁸³ Fairchilds, 'The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', p. 232.

⁸⁴ Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Guilds, Efficiency, and Social Capital: Evidence from German Proto-Industry', *Economic History Review*, 57/2 (2004), 286-333.

⁸⁵ Farr, 'On the Shop Floor: Guilds, Artisans, and the European Market Economy, 1350-1750', p. 26; Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, trans. Carol Shelton (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 142.

⁸⁶ The practice of non-guild activity is examined at length in Chapter 5.

⁸⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-Century Lyon', in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 167-97; Harriet Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division*

women were productive members of the economy, particularly through their roles in textile production which often took place in the home through putting out systems and cottage industry. Furthermore, as Geraldine Sheridan has shown in her work on the portrayal of women workers in eighteenth-century France, written documents can be misleading about the reality of female participation in the world of early modern work.⁸⁸ It has been widely acknowledged that the guild system provided both opportunities and challenges for female workers.⁸⁹ Whilst all-female guilds existed such as the seamstresses and linen-drapers in Paris, at the same time many guilds excluded women from their ranks completely, pushing many women into the world of clandestine production which took place on the margins of guild jurisdiction. The work of Daryl M. Hafter on eighteenth-century Lyon, however, has shown that clandestine production could be beneficial for female workers. Hafter has demonstrated that women who worked outside of guild regulation in the silk, button and hat trade used a number of entrepreneurial strategies to capitalise on their position as so-called 'illicit' workers and many ran their own successful workshops.⁹⁰

of Labour in Employment (Cambridge: Polity in Association with Basil Blackwell, 1989); Pat Hudson and W. R. Lee, eds, *Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Musgrave, 'Women in the Male World of Work: The Building Industries of Eighteenth-Century Brittany', *French History*, 7/1 (1993), 30-52.

⁸⁸ Geraldine Sheridan, *Louder than Words: Ways of Seeing Women Workers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), pp. 76-7.

⁸⁹ See for example: Judith G. Coffin, 'Gender and the Guild Order: The Garment Trades in Eighteenth-Century Paris' *Journal of Economic History*, 54/4 (1994), 768-93; Daryl M. Hafter, 'Guilds, Businesswomen, and Early Modern Economics in a Transitional Era', *Proceedings Western Society For French History*, 32 (2006), 16-28; Hafter, 'Female Masters in the Ribbonmaking Guild of Eighteenth-Century Rouen', *French Historical Studies*, 20/1 (1997), 1-14; Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2007); Hafter, *European Women and Preindustrial Craft* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Crowston, *Fabricating Women*; Crowston, 'Engendering the Guilds: Seamstresses, Tailors, and the Clash of Corporate Identities in Old Regime France', *French Historical Studies* 23/2 (2000), 339-72; Cynthia Truant, 'The Guildswomen of Paris: Gender, Power, and Sociability in the Old Regime', *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, 15 (1988), 130-38.

⁹⁰ Hafter, 'Women in the Underground Business of Eighteenth-Century Lyon', *Enterprise & Society* 2 (2001), 11-40; Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France*.

Sources

Investigating the complicated relationship between the consumption and professional production of embroidery for secular clothing requires the use of diverse sources, each of which has its limitations. The range of sources used by scholars working on eighteenth-century consumption, fashion, retail and production includes probate inventories, newspaper advertisements, trade cards, as well as financial information such as account books and trade data. This is the first study of embroidery to analyse quantitative data such as account books, alongside qualitative data such as correspondence, the fashion press and objects. It utilises a variety of printed and manuscript sources from the Archives nationales, Archives de Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Archives municipales de Lyon, Archives départementales du Rhône, Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service, West Sussex Record Office, and Winterthur Museum and Library. These sources include archival documents such as bankruptcy records, account books and notarial acts, as well as personal and commercial correspondence, printed texts issued by the French royal government, guild records, trade cards, and the periodical press. I also draw upon object and printed visual sources from the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum, Musée des Tissus et des Arts décoratifs and Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum where I have examined a range of embroidered garments (both complete and incomplete), samples, and paper designs.

The objects are useful in giving an impression of the material qualities of the embroidery described in written sources, even though they have often been altered or suffered wear and tear from use. They can also provide a counter-view of the idealised images of fashionable clothing found in the contemporary fashion press, which can be considered in some ways, a form of fashion ‘propaganda’.⁹¹ Objects can, of course, act as vehicles for understanding the technical references made in written sources such as *L’Art du brodeur*, thereby enhancing understanding of the production techniques employed by the professional embroiderers. Nevertheless, bringing together objects and written documents presents a number of challenges. Firstly, the chronologies of archival documents and surviving objects do not necessarily correspond, meaning a direct comparison is not always possible. Secondly, written descriptions of embroidery materials

⁹¹ See Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester and New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 135-40.

or motifs in account books and other archive documentation were recorded in an idiosyncratic manner: some were highly descriptive, whilst others recorded minimal information only. This again makes a direct comparison with surviving objects problematic and so care must be taken to account for these discrepancies.

The main group of objects that I have identified at the V&A which is relevant for this study comprises pieces of complete and incomplete embroidered clothing which cover the period 1700-1800.⁹² There are several limitations of using these objects as sources, which are as follows. Firstly, and as Miller has noted, the most expensive silks which contained real gold and silver were made into court gowns. Yet the high precious metal content in these textiles mean that few such garments survive because they were ‘unpicked or burned to regain their metal content.’⁹³ This is also the case for embroidery. Few of the elaborately embroidered court suits, waistcoats and gowns in gold and silver survive in museum collections today. The majority of embroidered clothing which does survive are those garments which have been exceptionally well preserved, or are those which have been embroidered in silk, chenille, wool or cotton.

Secondly, little is known about the majority of these objects, except that curators at the museum have dated them to the eighteenth century and, based on curatorial knowledge, suggested that they are probably French. In the majority of cases, my own physical analysis of the objects has confirmed the catalogue information, the archival evidence I have uncovered providing a more precise date for the objects. Furthermore, catalogue information tends to rely on art historical labels such as ‘baroque’, ‘rococo’ and ‘neoclassical’. Such labels are not necessarily helpful and are an anachronistic way of categorising embroidery designs which, in the eighteenth century, were not thought about in terms of chronological styles, but rather in the latest ‘taste’, a concept which will be explored in Chapter 2. Finally, in using such sources it is important to address the collecting strategies and priorities of institutions.⁹⁴ The V&A collects objects first and

⁹² This thesis is the result of a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership between the University of Warwick and the V&A Museum, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Its aim was to contextualise more fully the eighteenth-century French embroidered objects in the V&A’s collections.

⁹³ Miller, *Selling Silks*, p. 14.

⁹⁴ Museums collect clothing and textiles for a variety of reasons. Some collections are accidents of survival, whilst others are deliberately acquired for their provenance (i.e. because of the individual who owned them), their rarity, their representativeness of a period or group of people,

foremost for aesthetic and technical merit, a strategy which has been in place from the 1850s onwards. The object sources at the V&A are therefore not representative of all embroidery from the eighteenth century. It is for this reason that I have also chosen select objects from the Musée des Tissus et des Arts décoratifs and Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.⁹⁵ Due to the limitations of using objects, I have also chosen to use primary printed visual sources, such as contemporary portraiture, fashion plates, and engravings. These will be used to demonstrate how embroidery was worn and perceived by contemporaries, although it is recognised that such sources were also the product of the vision of the artist and the intended audience. Nevertheless, employing a variety of sources ensures a multifaceted analysis of the wearing of embroidery during the eighteenth century.

Throughout this thesis I draw extensively upon and challenge *L'Art du brodeur*, a treatise on embroidery written by Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin and published in Paris in 1770.⁹⁶ His text on embroidery is highly useful for studying the embroidery trade of

or for their quality or design. Historically, there has been a bias towards collecting elite clothing or clothing considered of unique aesthetic value. Scholars who have engaged with these issues include Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*; Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*; Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). More recently, Miller has discussed these issues within the context of creating the 'Europe 1600-1815' galleries at the V&A museum. See Miller, 'Preface', *Luxury: History, Culture, Consumption*, 4/2-3 (2017), 111-14; Miller, 'Luxury in Europe 1600-1815: Negotiating Narratives 2010-15', *Luxury: History, Culture, Consumption*, 4/2-3 (2017), 115-41.

⁹⁵ The variety of acquisition strategies of these institutions ensures that I have a greater range of sources for this study. For example, the Musée des Tissus is primarily focused on the history of textiles and fashion, with an important collection of eighteenth-century textiles with a Lyonnais provenance. The Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum's priority is to acquire objects which are significant for their contribution to the history of design, and their collection of embroidery samples has been useful for Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁹⁶ This thesis uses Nikki Scheuer's English translation of the text which was published by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1983. This is the only known English translation of *L'Art du brodeur* to date and Scheuer's English translation is a particularly useful reference for the modern reader as the original engravings have been included alongside the relevant commentaries in the English translation, whilst the original French version included the engravings as a series at the end of the text. Nevertheless, the focus of this thesis is on the facsimile of the original French

eighteenth-century France due to its explanation of the production process which includes how the design was prepared, detailed descriptions of embroidery techniques, as well as methods of caring for embroidery once it had been finished.⁹⁷ Saint-Aubin's observations are also useful in identifying gender roles in the production of embroidery. The masculine and feminine pronouns which are used throughout the text suggest that certain tasks or techniques were the domain of men, whilst others were carried out primarily by women. My analysis of account books is used to interrogate this further.

Saint-Aubin's treatise on embroidery has been used extensively by scholars in the study of the technical and design aspects of embroidery, relatively uncritically. There are several limitations of using Saint-Aubin's text. Firstly, Saint-Aubin was not an embroiderer by trade. Whilst he may have made first-hand observations of the occupation and the production process from his father's work, it would be unwise to rely too heavily on the observations of someone who did not necessarily have the technical training. Rather, Saint-Aubin's view of the trade was from the point of view of a designer, even admitting himself that he considered the design to be the most important aspect of embroidery.⁹⁸ Secondly, this also suggests that we should proceed with caution when reading Saint-Aubin's comments on the social and economic aspects of the trade, which may not have been based on reliable or accurate evidence. Finally, the bias of Saint-Aubin's writing must be recognised, in that he was patronised by the king and upheld the discourse of the royal government. Saint-Aubin therefore provides a one-sided account of the trade, and his explanations are mostly limited to the guild-regulated trade. It is undeniable that *L'Art du brodeur* is a useful source of embroidery-related information, yet to uncritically accept Saint-Aubin's assertions would be to ignore a wealth of other sources which have hitherto remained obscure in the history of the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France. Read alongside other official documents, such as the statutes of the Paris guild of embroiderers and decrees issued by the royal government, we are left with a theoretical discourse which promotes a story of embroidery which is uncomplicated, in both its consumption and production.

The statutes of the guild of embroiderers are used in this study as a source to investigate how the guild sought to regulate the production of embroidery. This thesis

text which is included in the 1983 edition and where possible, I have used my own translations of the original French.

⁹⁷ Edward Maeder, 'Introduction' in Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, pp. 10-12 (p. 10).

⁹⁸ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 4.

focuses on the set of statutes which were registered by the guild and approved by the *parlement* in 1718, a renewal of the statutes which had previously been registered in 1649.⁹⁹ The statutes are a useful source for examining the administrative structure of the guild and the theoretical framework within which professional embroiderers in Paris were expected to conduct their work. Other official documents which deal with the activities of the guild are drawn upon, such as legal disputes with competitor guilds and *Arrêts de la cour des monnaies*, which document legal action taken by the guild against workers who have contravened the guild regulations in some form. The majority of the city's guild records were unfortunately destroyed by a fire at the Hôtel de Ville in 1871. For Lyon, sourcing official documentation on the subject of the embroidery trade is a complex task, as there was no guild to regulate the trade in this city. Since embroidery was closely related to the silk-weaving industry, the archives of the *Grand Fabrique* (the silk-weaving guild in Lyon) provide several documents, such as petitions and regulations, which give a useful insight into where the embroidery trade was situated within the broader context of the silk-weaving industry in Lyon. Nevertheless and as with Saint-Aubin's text, these sources are limited in their scope for interrogating the workings of the embroidery trade outside of guild jurisdiction, and account for just one side of a multifaceted story.

This thesis thus engages with a range of notarial documentation, such as business deals (*marchés*), agreements (*conventions*), statements of work (*mémoires de travaux*), receipts (*quittances*), and partnerships (*sociétés*), among others, to explore the biases found within official printed sources and to investigate the trade from the point of view of the embroiderers themselves. At the Archives nationales, the Y Series is particularly useful for investigating the types of disputes which occurred between masters, and between masters and the guild.¹⁰⁰ These inform my analysis of clandestine production and the role of women in the Paris embroidery trade in Chapter 5, where the visibility of women in the official printed discourse of the guild was particularly scarce. Indeed, one of the main methodological issues of this research is the scarcity of sources for women, a problem

⁹⁹ *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris, 1718* (Paris: Impr. De Valleyre, 1758).

¹⁰⁰ AN Y 9372-9396b: 'Avis du procureur du roi sur des contestations entre ouvriers et maîtres des métiers de Paris. Bons de maîtrises et de jurandes', 1681-1790. My survey of this series was based on sampling to cover the beginning, middle and end of the chronological period of this thesis. It should be noted that not all of the years were available for consultation during my visits to the archives. In total, I consulted the years 1690-1716; 1730-39; 1751-52; and 1761-89.

which is unsurprising for this period of study. Legal cases both in Paris and Lyon provide one of the most fruitful sources for reconstructing the experience of female embroiderers during the eighteenth century. For example, the 'Registres des contraventions' at the Archives municipales de Lyon hold records of disputes between those working within the *arts et métiers* community and record 254 cases between embroiderers and other competitor trades.¹⁰¹

The bankruptcy records at the Archives de Paris and the Archives départementales du Rhône are particularly rich sources for investigating the complexities of consumption, distribution and production in the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France. For some embroiderers and embroidery merchants, the bankruptcy files contain a combination of both qualitative and quantitative information in the form of commercial correspondence and account books, whilst others contain solely financial information. The main limitation of using bankruptcy records of professional embroiderers, is that few exist across the eighteenth century. In Paris, there are just eight bankruptcy files on record for professional embroiderers for the whole of the eighteenth century, whilst in Lyon there is just one, and this is for an embroidery merchant. The close relation of embroidery to the silk-weaving industry in Lyon however, means that a considerable amount of information on the embroidery trade is to be found within the bankruptcy records of silk merchants rather than embroiderers. Nevertheless, these files contain extensive accounts, order books and client lists which enable me to reconstruct the consumer base of embroidery, analyse retail prices for different types of embroidery, as well as examining the costs involved in the production process.

This thesis focuses on four of the eight bankruptcies in Paris, chosen for their chronological relevance and for the extent of the information contained within the files. Two have been chosen for their account and order books, whilst two have been chosen because their bankruptcy statements enable me to reconstruct their professional networks. The first of those chosen for their account and order books is Jean Megret, a master embroiderer (*maître brodeur*) whose file covers the years 1720-25 and contains a detailed account book.¹⁰² This account book documents the embroidery orders which Megret completed during a five-year period, with each order accompanied by a

¹⁰¹ The second half of the eighteenth century was the focus of this sampling method due to the considerable popularity of embroidered textiles during this particular period.

¹⁰² ADP D5/B6/Reg. 591 (greffe 123): 'Jean Megret, Livre de comptes des avancées et fourniture des ouvrages qui concernent la broderie', 1720-25.

breakdown in costs by materials and tasks. The second bankruptcy file which contains an extensive order book is that of Louis Jacques Balzac, embroiderer to the king (*brodeur privilégié du roi*).¹⁰³ His order book covers the years 1760-62 and contains information concerning customers, prices, and detailed descriptions of the embroidery produced. The third bankruptcy file has been chosen for its statement of debtors and creditors and is that of Etienne Marcel Duhamel, also a master embroiderer. His file from 1749 contains an extensive record of debtors and creditors and contributes to our understanding of the subcontracting and credit networks in which professional embroiderers were embroiled.¹⁰⁴ Finally, the bankruptcy file of Trouillebert, also master embroiderer, from 1789 compliments that of Duhamel, which contains a statement of his debts.

For Lyon, this thesis draws upon the bankruptcy files of one embroidery merchant (Pascal, Vial et Cie, 1736-82) and two silk merchants (Fiard, 1757-85 and Villoud, Cadet et Cie, 1785-88), all of whom produced and distributed embroidery across France and Europe. This thesis analyses the commercial correspondence that they exchanged with their customers and other merchants alongside their account books. In particular, this study makes extensive use of the bankruptcy files of Pascal, Vial et Cie, an embroidery merchant which operated in Lyon during the years 1736-82.¹⁰⁵ Pascal, Vial et Cie was founded by Paul Pascal in 1736 who himself originally trained as a gold lace-maker, and by 1742 he had a flourishing embroidery supplies business. In 1739, Paul's nephew, Joseph Pascal, apprenticed with him in the business of gold lace-making. After

¹⁰³ ADP D5/B6/reg.699: 'Louis Jacques Balzac, Registre des Livraisons d'Ouvrages Commencé le 1er Janvier 1760', 25 June 1763.

¹⁰⁴ ADP D4/B6/Cart. 8 dossier 408: 'Etienne Marcel Duhamel', 6 October 1749.

¹⁰⁵ ADR 8 B 1089/1-14: 'Pascal, Vial et Cie, broderies en dorures et en soie: Marchand broderie', 1746-82. The bankruptcy files of Pascal have been used for contextual information about Lyon embroidery in the eighteenth century by Alice Joly and Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, who has referenced Joly's work. Joly's chapter has provided a useful overview of the history of the Pascal business. Baudis has used examples from Pascal's files in her thesis, however to date, no study has made extensive use of Pascal's account and order books, and correspondence. See Alice Joly, 'Papiers d'un brodeur Lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle', in *La soierie de Lyon: Étoffes et productions diverses du syndicat des fabricants de soieries*, ed. by Pierre Argenet (Lyon: Syndicat des Fabricants de Soieries de Lyon, 1928), pp. 391-96; Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, *Gilets brodés: modèles du XVIIIe, musée des Tissus, Lyon* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), pp. 10-11; Baudis, 'Embroidery for Male Suiting and Waistcoats in Lyon, 1780-1789: A Cultural Biography of the Designs in the National Museum of Ireland Collection Presented by J. H. Fitzhenry'.

the death of Paul in 1743 and his wife Jeanne in 1748, the business was left to the guardianship of Joseph Pascal. Embroidery was a well-established trade in France by the time Joseph Pascal took over his uncle's business in Lyon, readily supplying the luxury clothing market in the major cities of France and elsewhere in Europe, and Pascal, Vial et Cie's place within this international trading context is evidenced through their surviving account books, order books and commercial correspondence. We know, for instance, that by the 1750s Pascal was part of a strong commercial network of *négociants*, or merchants, which extended across Europe. Tucked in the back of an account book, we find a list of European cities and key contacts including Milan, Lisbon and Naples.¹⁰⁶ In the 1740s right through until the 1770s, the Pascal business operated mainly as a supplier of primary materials for embroidery. By the 1770s, Pascal had diversified the nature of his business to become a merchant who actively facilitated the commission of complete embroidered products, particularly men's waistcoats, evidenced through both his order books and commercial correspondence during these later years of the eighteenth century. These files constitute a particularly important source for investigating the national and international commercial networks within the embroidery trade. They further allow for extensive investigation into the importance of Lyon as a tastemaker during the last decades of the eighteenth century.

There are common methodological issues across all of these bankruptcy records. The first is that each of these individuals used highly idiosyncratic accounting methods and ways of recording orders: no one account book is the same. It is therefore difficult to arrive at a comprehensive overview of the standard costs of producing embroidery and the prices which embroiderers were using during the eighteenth century. The second limitation of these sources is that qualitative information, such as product and material descriptions, is recorded differently by each individual, and sometimes not recorded at all.

Scholarship on consumption and material culture has promoted a systematic analysis of probate inventories as a way in which to interrogate the consumption habits of men and women in eighteenth-century society. This methodology has been used by historians to explore the material lives of individuals and households, and to analyse the accumulation of goods by certain types of people. In doing so, studies of this nature have made an important contribution to our understanding of the value and variety of goods,

¹⁰⁶ ADR 8 B 1089/5.

and the differences in material possessions between men and women, urban and rural, rich and poor.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, such a methodology is limited in its scope for capturing the nuances of consumption. Probate inventories alone cannot account for how and why a particular product was consumed, they can only quantify how many goods were owned at a certain point in an individual's life.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, probate inventories in general do not offer particularly detailed descriptions of clothing.¹⁰⁹ Since embroidery is an embellishment and thus a finer detail of an item of clothing, it would be risky to rely too heavily on inventories to convey this information accurately. Moreover and as already noted, due to its high value, embroidery in gold and silver was often melted down for re-use, or it was re-used as a trimming for other pieces of clothing or even furnishings, thus increasing the likelihood of embroidery being recorded in a way that would not necessarily be expected.

This thesis is interested in the consumption habits of embroidery. It is primarily interested in asking questions of how it was consumed, rather than on what scale it was consumed. As such, I use a variety of object, printed and manuscript sources to interrogate the nuances of how and why embroidery was purchased and worn during the eighteenth century. The periodical press is particularly useful for examining contemporary attitudes towards fashion. For the first half of the eighteenth century, I examine the

¹⁰⁷ For France, see the important work by Roche: Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*; Roche, *History of Everyday Things*. See also: Laurent Bourquin, 'Les objets de la vie quotidienne dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle à travers cent inventaires après décès parisiens', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 36/3 (1989), 464-75; Joël Cornette, 'La révolution des objets: le Paris des inventaires après décès (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 36/3 (1989), 476-86. Whilst this thesis focuses on France, it must be acknowledged that important studies on consumption in England have been produced using probate inventories. See for example: Weatherill, 'Consumer Behaviour and Social Status in England, 1660-1750', *Continuity and Change*, 1/2 (1986), 196-216; Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760*.

¹⁰⁸ de Vries, 'Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 85-132 (p. 102).

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Spufford, 'The Limitations of the Probate Inventory', in *English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, ed. by John A. Chartres and David Hey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 139-74 (p. 145).

fashion information which was published in the *Mercure* during the years 1678 to 1758.¹¹⁰ Although primarily considered as a literary periodical, its social commentaries on court life and events provide an invaluable source of fashion information in the absence of a dedicated fashion press during this period. For the later years of the eighteenth century, my analysis is concentrated on the *Galerie des modes et costumes français* (1778-87) and the *Cabinet des modes ou les modes nouvelles* (1785-86), both of which were published on a fortnightly basis and which had the specific objective of disseminating the latest fashions and tastes to their diverse readership.

Trade cards and bill heads are further important visual and textual sources as they enable me to reconstruct the retail environment of embroidery and how this changed over the course of the eighteenth century.¹¹¹ A common advertising strategy employed by shopkeepers from a variety of trades, the trade card is suggestive of the myriad ways in which embroidery was sold during this period. Not only does it convey an image of the retailer, but also that of the intended customer of their products. As such, these sources provide another lens through which to approach the complex issue of consumption. In order to fully engage with the multifaceted messages which the trade card promoted, I have employed a combination of a visual analysis of the design of the card with a literary analysis of the accompanying text. However, apart from the larger dedicated collections of trade cards, such as the Waddesdon Manor Trade Card Collection, the Banks and Heal Collection at the British Museum, and the John Johnson Collection at the Bodleian Library, trade cards and bill heads are notoriously difficult to track down in archives and libraries. Historically classed as printed ephemera, aside from the collections mentioned above, there has been little effort to systematically gather and archive trade cards and bill heads in their own right. The examples have therefore been gathered from a number of different sources. These include the Waddesdon Manor collection, the two albums of trade cards at the Archives de Paris, and private papers of aristocratic individuals (T Series) at the Archives nationales in Paris. The examples date from the late seventeenth

¹¹⁰ The *Mercure* was published under three different titles over the course of its publication: the *Mercure galant* (1672-1724), the *Nouveau Mercure galant* (1677-1724) and as the *Mercure de France* (1724-91). The analysis of this periodical has been greatly enhanced by the digitised issues currently available on <gallica.bnf.fr> of which the years 1678-1758 are online.

¹¹¹ For a comparative analysis of the trade card in eighteenth-century Britain and France, see Berg and Helen, 'Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France', *Cultural and Social History*, 4/2 (2007), 145-70.

century to the late eighteenth century, however, it should be noted that the majority of examples found date from the 1770s and 1780s.

Correspondence – both personal and business – is central to this thesis' examination of the ways in which embroidery was purchased, owned and worn. Personal correspondence exchanged between consumers, such as family members and friends, documents the myriad ways in which French embroidery was desired by an international elite clientele, and shows that it was a product used to signal one's adherence to a standard of 'good taste' during this period. These exchanges are used to argue that French embroidery was distributed via informal networks between travelling family members and friends, and that the notion of 'taste' was an inextricable part of buying embroidery. English sources are used to convey the geographical reach of the French embroidery trade and to demonstrate the extent to which there was a pan-European taste for fashionable French embroidery during this period. By analysing the vocabulary in such correspondence, I am able to demonstrate that taste formation in fashionable embroidery design was shaped according to a shared understanding of fashionable culture. In comparison, the business correspondence exchanged between merchants in Paris and Lyon reinforces that a shared understanding of fashionable embroidery design was formed through the interdependent networks of consumers, merchants and designers.

Thesis Structure

The embroidery trade is used in this thesis as a case study for exploring the flexibility of a luxury product. This thesis suggests that embroidery transcended the boundaries of 'old' and 'new' luxury; that it was both 'old' and 'new' simultaneously. This, it will be argued, was a result of the varied needs and desires of its dynamic clientele, who were on the one hand bound by the visual codes of court etiquette, and on the other, attracted by fashion. It argues that the dual nature of this consumption had a profound effect on the ways in which embroidery was designed, retailed and produced. As a result, this thesis takes the reader on a journey in five chapters from the consumption of embroidery through to its production in eighteenth-century Paris and Lyon.

The first chapter establishes how, why and by whom, French embroidery was consumed during the eighteenth century. It provides an overview of professionally-embroidered secular clothing for elite men and women, and documents how this changed over the course of the eighteenth century. An analysis of object sources alongside primary

printed visual sources, such as fashion plates and paintings, demonstrates how an expensive embellishment in gold, silver and silks, which had once been the sole reserve of the king and the Church, diversified into a more fashionable product. It explains how the court, the main consumer base of both types of embroidery, was not static but highly mobile and dynamic. Perpetuating tradition by wearing clothing which adhered to the sartorial etiquette of the court was not necessarily in opposition to fashion. Embroidery reflected this and reinvented itself with its clientele. As the nobility underwent social, political and economic changes, embroidery changed to fit their needs and desires. As a result, the market for embroidery from the mid-eighteenth century onwards diverged into two parallel streams: etiquette and fashion. An examination of how luxury embroidered clothing was consumed by these men and women provides important context for the following chapters.

Chapter 2 examines how the peculiarities of this consumption affected the evolution of fashionable embroidery design in the eighteenth century. In particular, it analyses the formation and communication of taste in fashionable embroidery design through a close examination of personal and commercial correspondence. In doing so, it argues that a standard of ‘good taste’ was formed through the interdependent networks of consumers, designers and merchants. Furthermore, it challenges the traditionally-perceived geographies of taste during this period and argues that taste formation was more fluid than has been previously suggested. As such, it re-examines the primacy of Paris as a leader of fashion and taste, and attributes greater agency to Lyon as a tastemaker during this period.

Chapter 3 investigates the retail and distribution channels of the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France, examining the ways in which embroidery was marketed through trade cards and physical samples, where it was sold, and how it was distributed. It argues that the dual nature of consumer demand for embroidery considered in the previous two chapters – that of etiquette and that of fashion – led to embroidery being retailed according to two parallel branches of the same market. An analysis of the account books and trade cards of court embroiderers demonstrates that the market which supplied consumers with the bespoke embroidery required by court etiquette was generally stable and endured until the end of the *ancien régime*. In contrast, a market for embroidery which was driven by fashion emerged during the second half of the century, enjoying its most successful years from the 1770s onwards. This chapter reinforces the argument that embroidery was a fluid luxury product and receptive to the changing

demands of its clientele. It does so by demonstrating how the *marchands merciers* of Paris and the contemporary fashion press of the 1780s repackaged embroidery as a fashionable product and deflected its connotations of ‘old’ luxury. This was achieved through the promotion of embroidery from Lyon, which consisted in the main of men’s embroidered waistcoats. This chapter thus brings to the fore the interdependency of Paris and Lyon, building on the argument of Chapter 2 by demonstrating how Lyon played an essential role in distributing fashionable embroidery via the *marchands merciers* of Paris. Finally, a discussion of the second-hand clothing market, alongside the concept of ‘ready-made’, demonstrates how new modes of consuming in the late eighteenth century and a desire for variety and novelty, further emphasised the importance of Lyon as a tastemaker.

Chapters 4 and 5 turn to an examination of the making of embroidery. The former situates the embroidery trade within the broader context of the guild system of eighteenth-century France. It responds to the arguments of the previous chapters by considering how the dual nature of consumer demand and its corresponding retail markets were situated within contrasting institutional frameworks. In examining the institutional contexts in which embroidery in Paris and Lyon was produced, it argues that the guild in Paris was not an effective production framework for responding to consumer demand. Engaging with the primary printed materials produced by the guild, such as its official statutes, this chapter charts how the guild presented itself over the course of the eighteenth century and how it attempted to respond to consumer demand for its products. Although there was no guild to regulate the production of embroidery in Lyon, the trade was located within the broader context of the *Grand Fabrique*. Whilst the *Grand Fabrique* attempted to regulate the embroidery trade, embroidery in Lyon nevertheless remained a ‘free’ trade. This chapter argues that the absence of a guild in Lyon enabled its embroiderers to adapt and respond quickly to fluctuations in consumer demand, and that their non-guild status was essential to contributing to the fashionable status of Lyon embroidery in the late eighteenth century.

The final chapter of this thesis examines the consequences of both consumption and the institutional environment on the production of embroidery. Having examined the theoretical context of guild and non-guild regulated production, Chapter 5 analyses the reality of how production was organised in Paris and Lyon in response to the two distinct spheres of consumption in the embroidery trade: etiquette and fashion. Through an analysis of account books, legal disputes and notarial documentation, it demonstrates how the production of embroidery entailed complicated networks of credit,

subcontracting, skill, and at times, clandestine production. It begins by examining the credit relations with the embroiderers' aristocratic clientele, where it will become apparent that the lengthy terms of credit granted to customers for expensive embroidered clothing ordered for the sartorial etiquette of the court was incompatible with the strict production regulations of the Paris guild. Secondly, it analyses the subcontracting networks of the embroidery trade and how these extended across the jurisdiction of the guild, where master embroiderers engaged in illicit production by subcontracting work to embroiderers within the privileged areas of Paris, most notably the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. An analysis of legal cases from across the eighteenth century demonstrates how it was mostly women who produced embroidery in these areas, yet it was their status as non-guild workers which enabled the embroidery trade to successfully meet consumer demand for the sartorial etiquette of the court. Similarly, the absence of a guild in Lyon, where the embroidery trade was dominated by female workers, contributed to the new fashionability of Lyonnais embroidery.

CHAPTER 1

Consuming Embroidery in Eighteenth-Century France

Introduction

Embroidery was a well-established luxury trade in France by the beginning of the eighteenth century. The most expensive embroidery in gold, silver and silk was consumed by the nobility, who commissioned bespoke embroidered garments for formal appearances at court. These garments were required in order for noble men and women to adhere to the sartorial etiquette dictated by centuries of royal tradition, and which continued throughout the *ancien régime*. Embroidery was elaborate and costly. It can be considered an example of the ‘old’ luxury which was associated with ostentatious displays of aristocratic excess. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, there was a noticeable increase in simpler styles of embroidery which complicates embroidery’s categorisation as merely part of the ‘old’ luxury of the elites. This style of embroidery was lighter in both design and material, generally less expensive, and considered to be ‘fashionable’. Furthermore, evidence from contemporary portraits, the fashion press, and personal correspondence suggests that this type of embroidery was consumed by the same clientele who purchased elaborately-embroidered clothing in gold and silver – or the ‘old’ luxury – thus complicating the traditionally perceived categories of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury.¹

Understanding the consumption of embroidery is complicated by the need to investigate the wide variety of embroidered products made during the eighteenth century. This chapter examines a select group of items, setting up the analysis in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis. It introduces the main garments worn by elite men and women throughout the eighteenth century in order to analyse change and continuity in the consumption of professionally-made embroidery: the male three-piece suit with a focus on the waistcoat, and the female gown. This chapter first examines the embroidered garments worn by men and women at court and analyses the extent to which courtly codes of etiquette regulated consumer behaviour. It shows that the periodicals of the early

¹ See for example Jan de Vries, ‘Luxury and the Golden Age in Theory and Practice’, in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 41-56.

eighteenth century reinforced this behaviour. It will then investigate the consumption of 'fashionable' embroidery and the ways in which it was consumed by the eighteenth-century European elites for the purposes of style or taste, rather than etiquette or courtly tradition. This chapter further demonstrates that whilst embroidery was purchased by both men and women, male consumption was particularly important to the embroidery trade, crossing international borders.²

1.1 Courtly Consumption

Dress historians have revealed that the cut and style of clothing for both men and women did not change substantially on a seasonal basis until the late eighteenth century.³ Rather, it was the pattern of the cloth and surface decoration, such as embroidery, or trimmings such as lace, that produced the most noticeable changes in appearance. In the eighteenth century, clothing was made from a variety of materials, the most luxurious being expensive silks, including a variety of figured silks and velvets.⁴ These materials, for suits for men and gowns for women, were available in a range of patterns, colours and textures. New designs were devised and put into production seasonally by silk manufacturers throughout France, but it was in Lyon that the greatest variety and quantities were produced.⁵ Striped, spotted, checked and plain silks were woven in a range of colours and techniques. In silk manufacturing, similar designs were adapted to elaborate or simpler styles to suit a variety of budgets.⁶ This was achieved through a variety of yarns, sometimes substituting one material for another: for example, texture might be achieved

² Historians have noted that French fashions for men were worn internationally during the eighteenth century. See for example Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe: 1715-1789* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002); Peter McNeil, *Pretty Gentlemen: Macaroni Men and the Eighteenth-Century Fashion World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018).

³ See for example Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, pp. 140-62.

⁴ The focus of this chapter and the thesis as a whole is on domestically-produced materials. It is recognised that imported foreign cottons were also considered luxury products but these will not be discussed in this thesis.

⁵ Lesley Ellis Miller, *Selling Silks: A Merchant's Sample Book 1764* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

economically by substituting chenille for metal threads.⁷ The most expensive silks contained real gold and silver, and one ell (*aune*) of the most expensive category of this type of silk could cost the equivalent of double a labourer's annual wage.⁸ Velvet, woven with a luxurious pile, was expensive due its complicated production process and the amount of raw materials required.⁹ At the lower end of the spectrum were the simplest striped or plain silks, as well as the mixed fabrics, which combined silk with wool and linen yarns sometimes producing a fabric that was cheaper still.¹⁰

Embroidery could be, and indeed was, added to these textiles. It was stitched through the fabric, the decorative element visible on the surface. Clothing was generally embroidered *à disposition*, that is, it was embroidered in the form of the end garment (figure 1.1). Coats and waistcoats could also be woven *à disposition* (figures 1.2a and 1.2b), but whilst this achieved a similar decorative effect to embroidery, it was technically more complicated.¹¹ Just as there was a 'hierarchy of [silk] products',¹² so too was there a hierarchy of embroidery. It was first and foremost a hierarchy of quality and cost, and this was most apparent in the skill used to execute the design and the materials used. Embroidery in gold, silver and silk adorned the most sumptuous figured silks, including velvets, for clothing to be worn at court (figure 1.3). Plainer silks, such as plain taffeta and satin, would be embroidered in coloured silk threads for more informal wear.

⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁸ Ibid., p. 14. One *aune* (ell) measured around 43 French inches (119 cm). See *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹ Miller tells us that 'It could require as much as five to seven times more yarn for its warp threads than a plain woven silk.' *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Clothing which was woven *à disposition* will not be discussed in detail in this thesis as it entailed a separate production process to embroidery and is considered to be the domain of the silk manufacturers.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

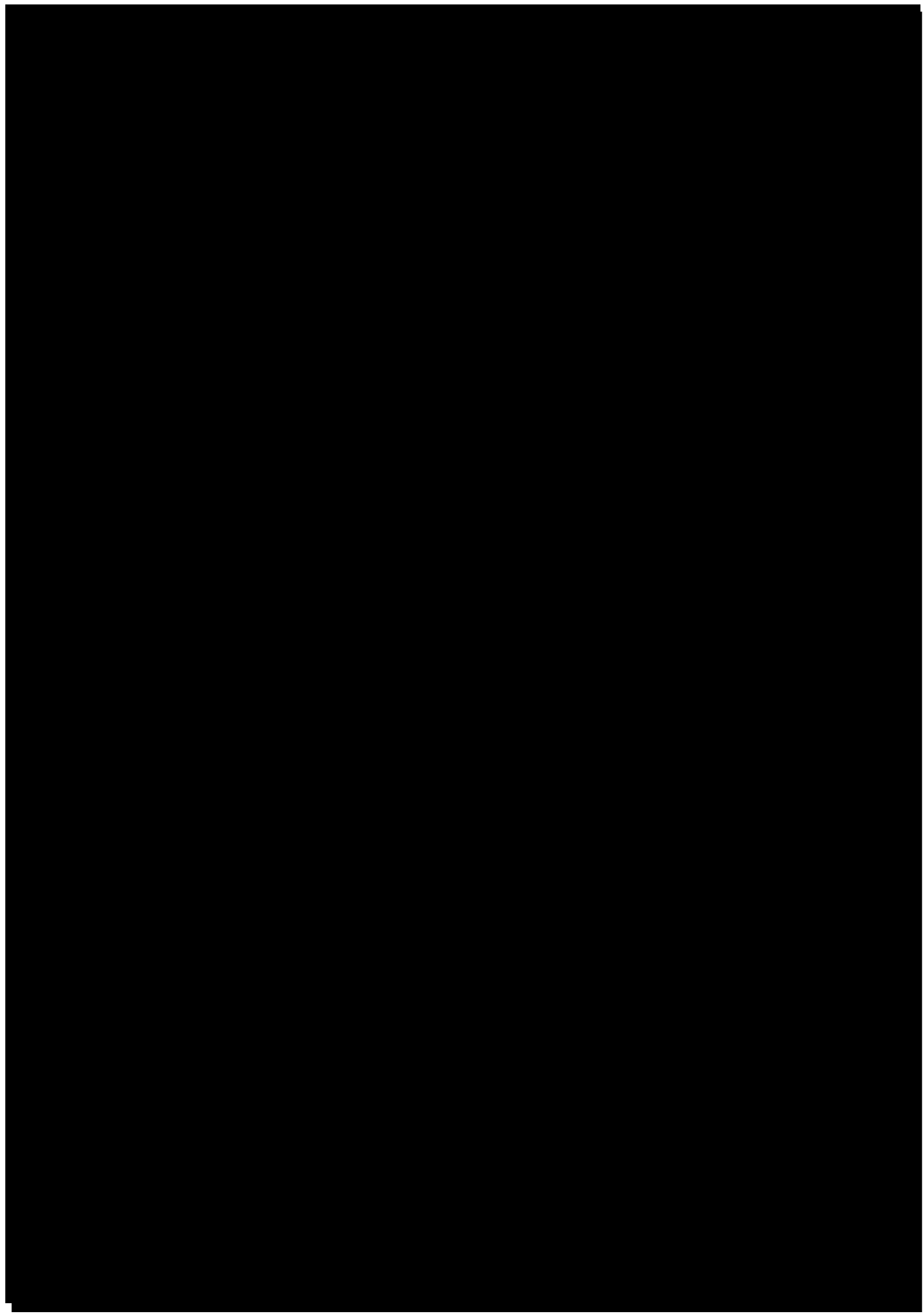


Figure 1.1. Waistcoat shape, silk embroidery on ribbed silk, France, 1780s. T. 427-1994.

© Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 1.2a. Waistcoat, the fronts woven *à disposition*, cut, uncut and voided velvet, France, 1760-65. 828-1904. © Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 1.2b. Detail of waistcoat, the fronts woven *à disposition*, cut, uncut and voided velvet, France, 1760-65. 828-1904. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

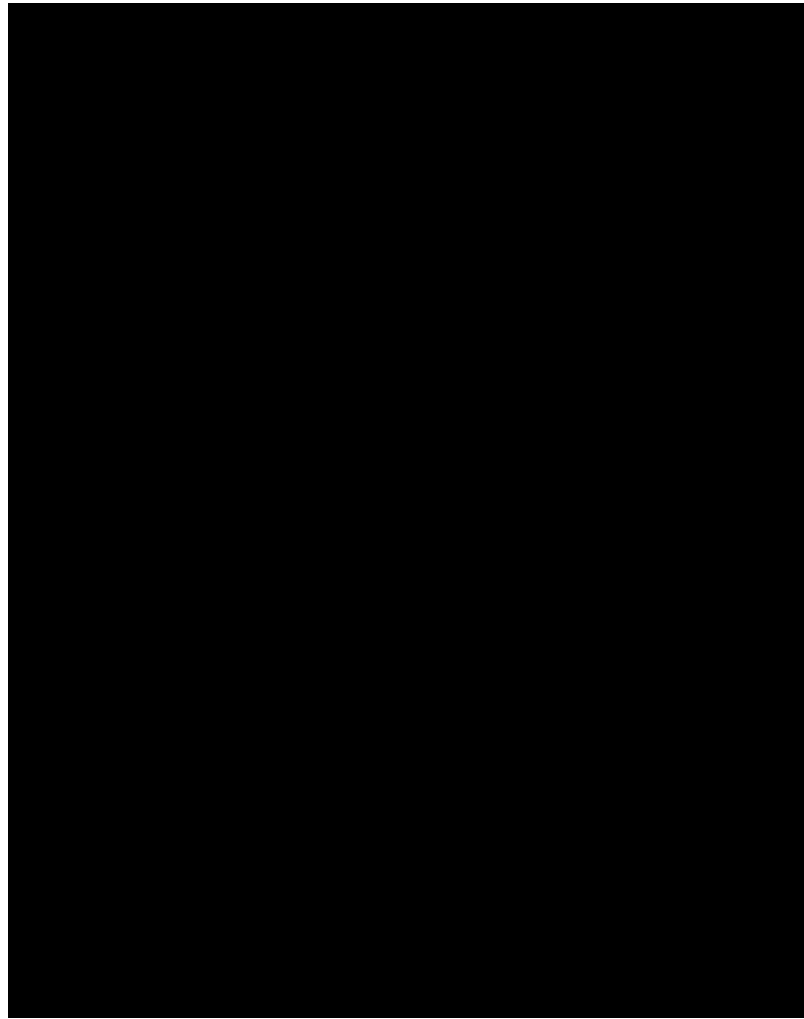


Figure 1.3. Detail of court dress coat, silver-gilt embroidery on cut velvet, France, 1760s. T.28&A-1952. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

1.1.1 Men's Clothing

As Daniel Roche has revealed through his examination of inventories, for men, the suit was generally found in the wardrobes of most, if not all, social classes.¹³ It comprised a coat, waistcoat and breeches. Whilst the suit was a staple of the male wardrobe during this period, it was the quality and taste of the suit – in terms of the materials and ornamentation – which distinguished the appearance of this garment as an elite piece of clothing and signalled the wearer's 'good taste'.¹⁴ The nobility possessed the most

¹³ Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 129.

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion of 'taste' in relation to eighteenth-century embroidery design, see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

elaborately patterned coats and waistcoats, and this study will focus on those which were embroidered on silk.

The cut of the coat and waistcoat remained fairly static in the early eighteenth century. From 1730 onwards, the silhouette of male dress became increasingly narrow and the amount of fabric used in men's clothing decreased.¹⁵ In the first half of the century, the coat was collarless and knee-length, with the pleats of the skirt flaring dramatically over the hips. These pleats were deep enough to form almost a complete circle when spread out. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the coat became shorter and more 'streamlined', losing the fullness which had once been achieved by the many pleats below the waist. It therefore used less material. In *L'Art du tailleur* (1769), François-Alexandre-Pierre Garsault included several diagrams to indicate how men and women's garments were constructed. Figure 1.4 suggests how these pleats looked and might have been constructed in the 1760s. This pattern is remarkably similar to that given by Juan de Albayzeta for a French suit in *Geometría, y trazas pertenecientes al oficio de sastres*, a tailoring manual published in Spain in 1720 (figure 1.5).¹⁶ Figure 1.5 indicates how the pleats of the coat during the earlier part of the century were much fuller than in the 1760s and also points to the international reach of French fashions during this period – an important consideration for later in this chapter. The waistcoat – known in French as a *veste* – was worn underneath the coat and became shorter as the century progressed. Note how much shorter the 1769 diagram for the waistcoat in figure 1.4 is compared to how it looked in the 1720s (figure 1.6). The waistcoat consisted of skirts, sleeves and pocket flaps. The back and sleeves of the waistcoat, which remained invisible under the coat, were usually made of a plain cheaper material whilst the front was lavishly decorated. The *veste* continued to be worn throughout the century but by the end of the period was considerably shorter than at the beginning, its skirts less pronounced. Despite these changes in cut, the coat, waistcoat and breeches continued to be worn together throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Around 1770 and at the time when the coat was beginning to be cut away at the front to more fully expose the front of the waistcoat, a

¹⁵ Madeleine Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 23-5.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Lesley E. Miller for this reference. See also Miller, 'Surface and Substance: Baroque Dress in Spain and France, 1600-1720', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. by John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ebook.

¹⁷ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 23-8.

new style of waistcoat was particularly fashionable among elite men. Known as a *gilet*, this sleeveless waistcoat, had no skirts, was cut straight across at the waist and had rectangular, straight pockets. Again, the front of the waistcoat bore the decoration, whilst the back of the garment was made out of a cheaper, plain material, such as linen.

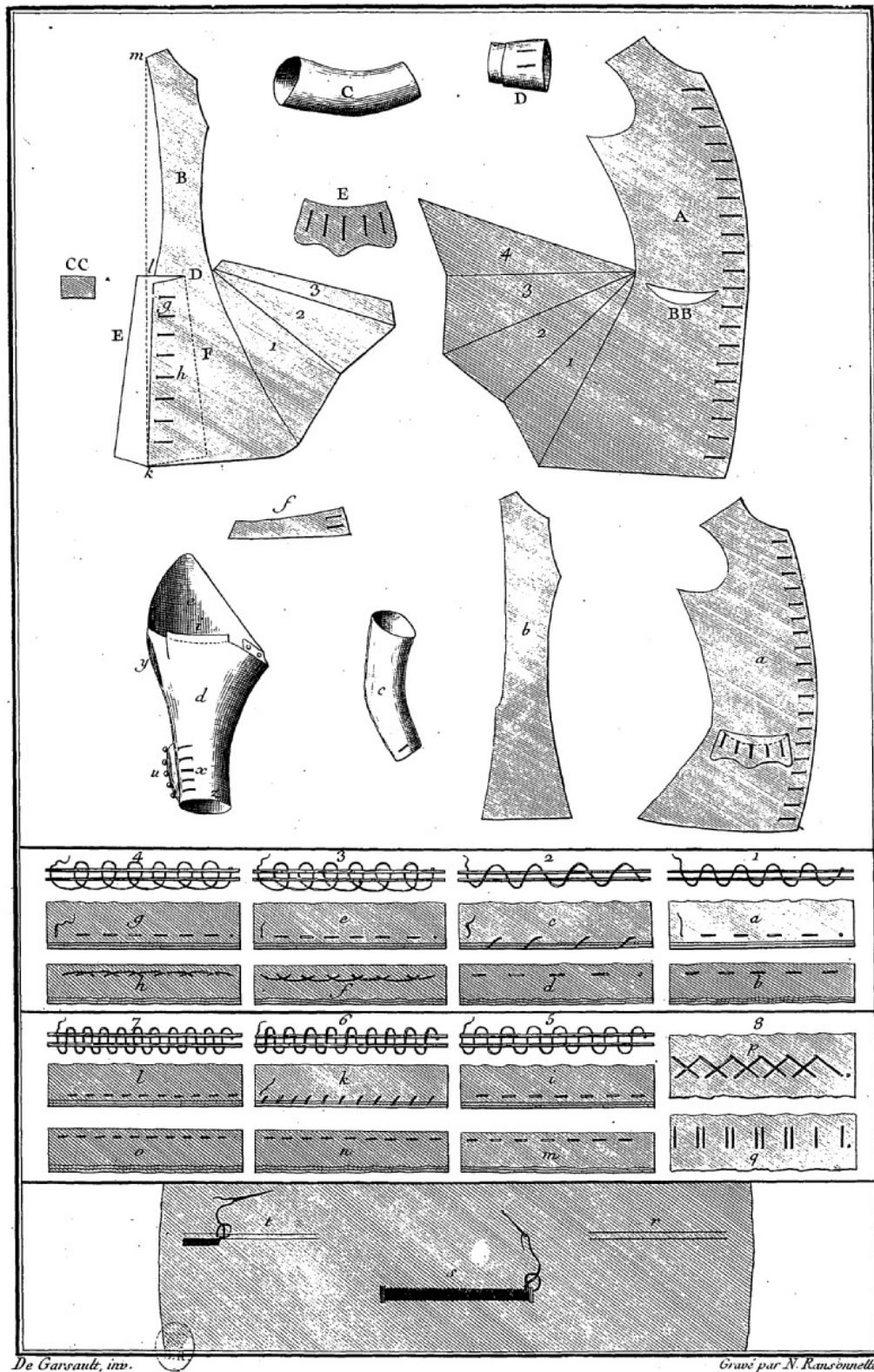


Figure 1.4. Construction of a man's coat and waistcoat from François-Alexandre-Pierre Garsault, *Art du tailleur: contenant le tailleur d'habits d'hommes, les culottes de peau, le tailleur de corps de femmes & enfants, la couturière & la marchande de modes* (Imp. de Delatour: Paris, 1769), Plate 5. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Fonds du service reproduction, V 3997.

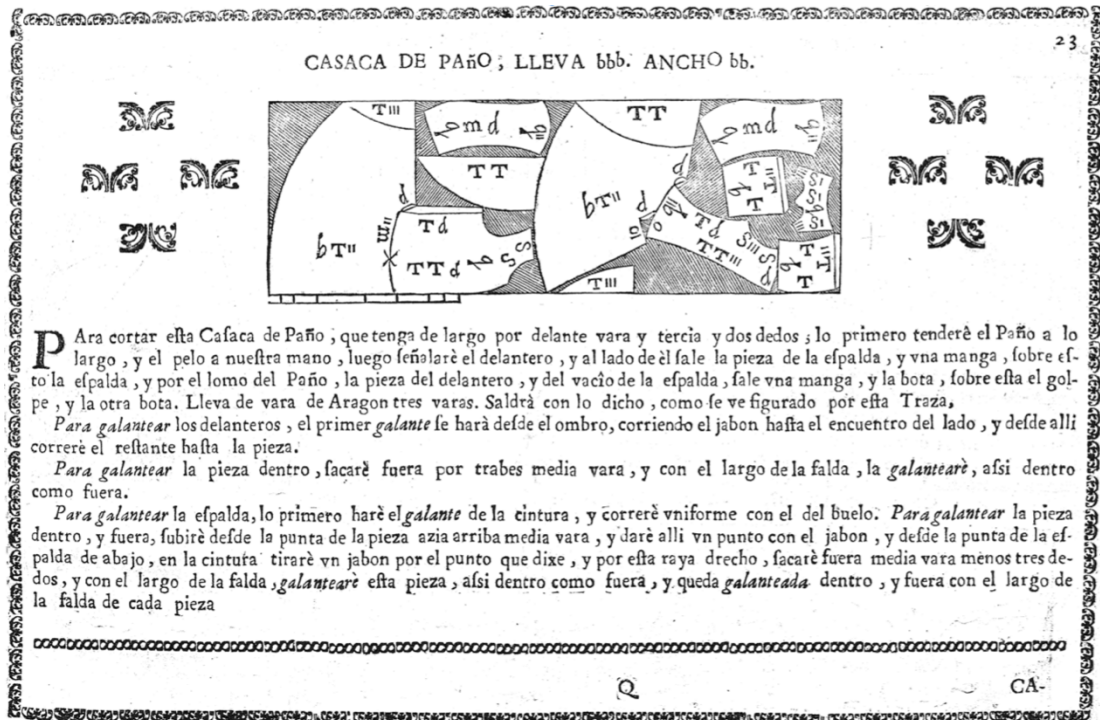


Figure 1.5. Construction of a man's coat in wool from Juan de Albayzeta, *Geometría, y trazas pertenecientes al oficio de sastres* (Zaragoza: Francisco Revilla, 1720), p. 23.

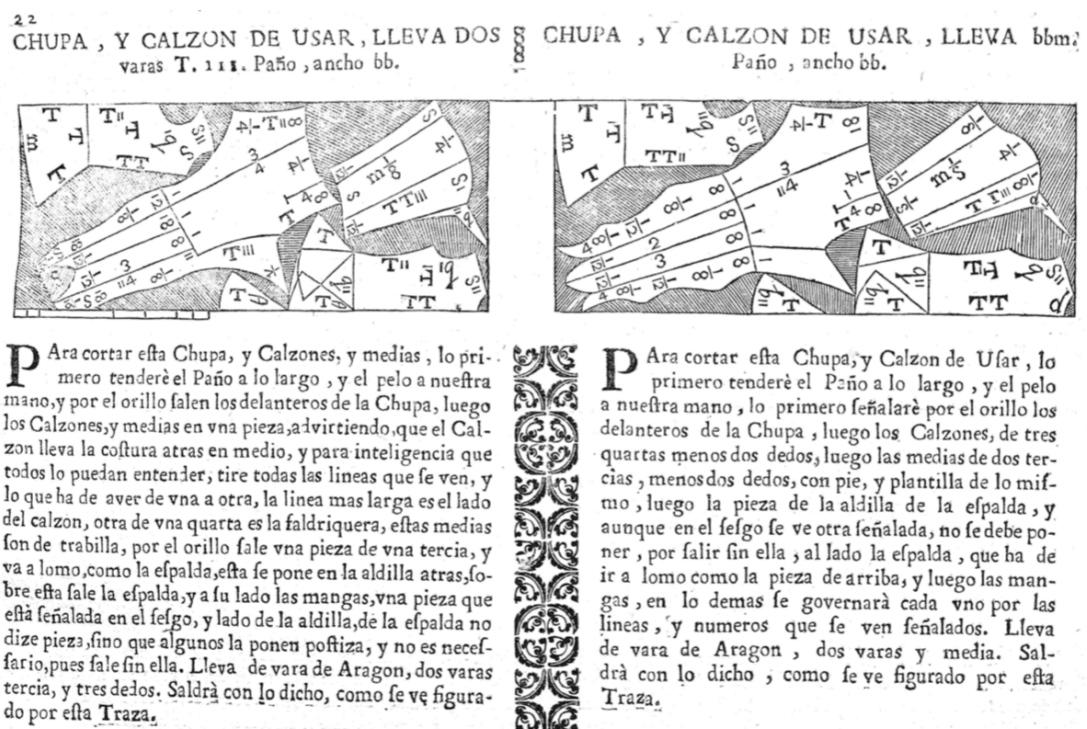


Figure 1.6. Construction of a man's waistcoat from Juan de Albayzeta, *Geometría, y trazas pertenecientes al oficio de sastres* (Zaragoza: Francisco Revilla, 1720), p. 22.

Coat, waistcoat and gilet could be embroidered in some form and those worn by the nobility were typically embroidered in gold, silver or silk. For the coat, the embroidery extended around the front, the pocket flaps, the sleeve cuffs, and the back and side pleats. The front of the waistcoat, the pocket flaps, as well as the buttons, were embroidered. For formal occasions, particularly court appearances, the three components of the suit matched. Known as the *habit habillée* or *habit à la française*, the suit was made of an expensive length of silk, the surface of which was elaborately embroidered. Figures 1.7a-1.7c show an example of a complete *habit à la française* from the early eighteenth century in which the coat, waistcoat and breeches match. The coat and waistcoat skirts come to just above the knee and the embroidery is executed in a similar shade of cream silk thread to the ground fabrics (*gros de Tours*, a type of plain-woven silk, and taffeta) used for the coat and waistcoat. The variety of embroidery stitches adds to the textured effect, whilst an element of subtlety is achieved through the blending of the embroidery colour with that of the background silk. The absence of gold or silver thread suggests that this suit may have been intended for less formal occasions. Nevertheless, the skill and extent of the design convey that this would still have been a costly outfit.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 1.7a. Front of complete suit, silk embroidery on *gros de Tours*, France, c. 1720-40.

MT 29861.1-3. © MTMAD.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 1.7b. Back of complete suit, silk embroidery on *gros de Tours*, France, c. 1720-40.

MT 29861.1-3. © MTMAD.

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Figure 1.7c. Detail of complete suit, silk embroidery on *gros de Tours*, France, c. 1720-40.

MT 29861.1-3. © MTMAD.

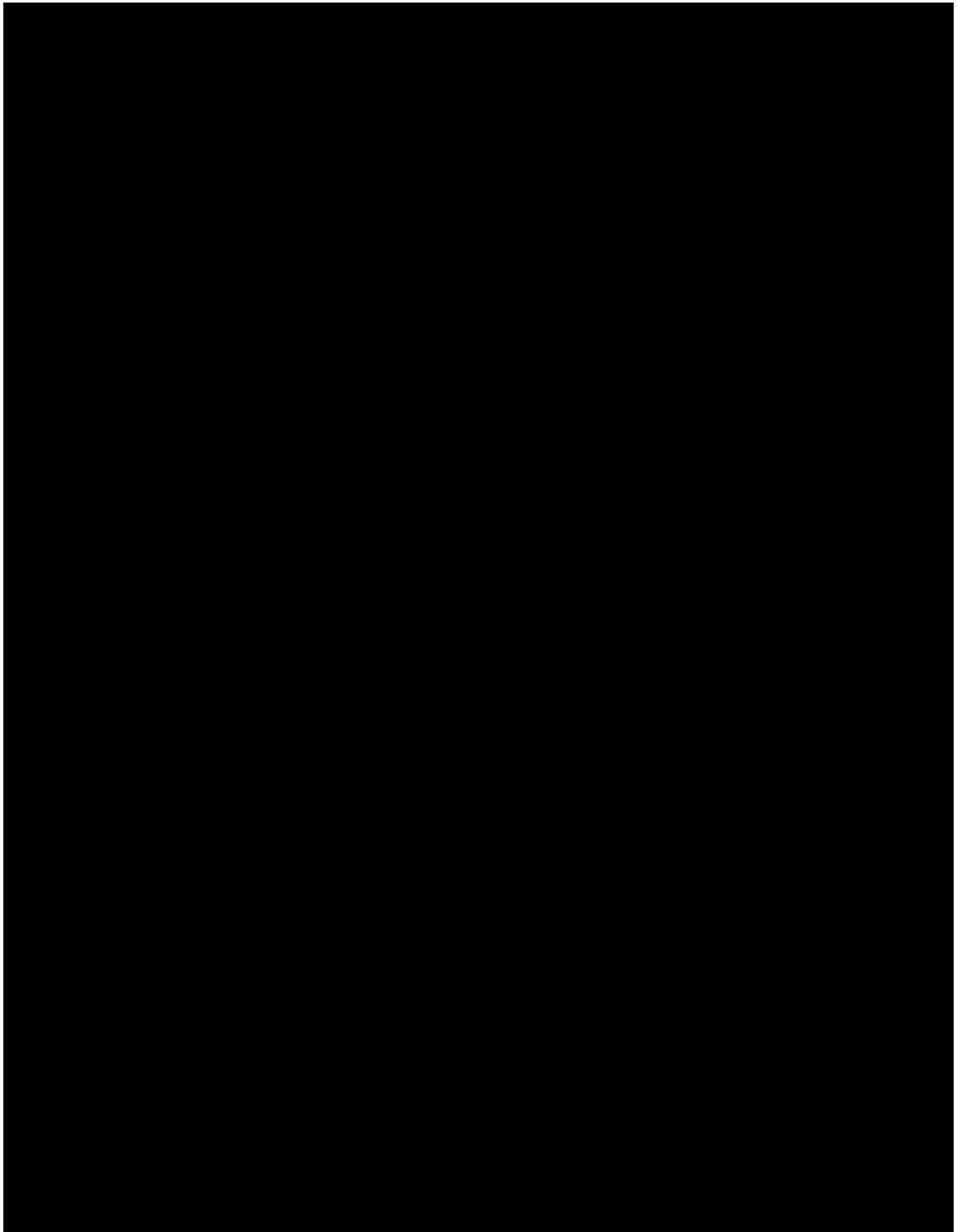


Figure 1.8a. Waistcoat, silk and silver embroidery on satin, France, 1730-39. 252-1906.

© Victoria and Albert Museum.

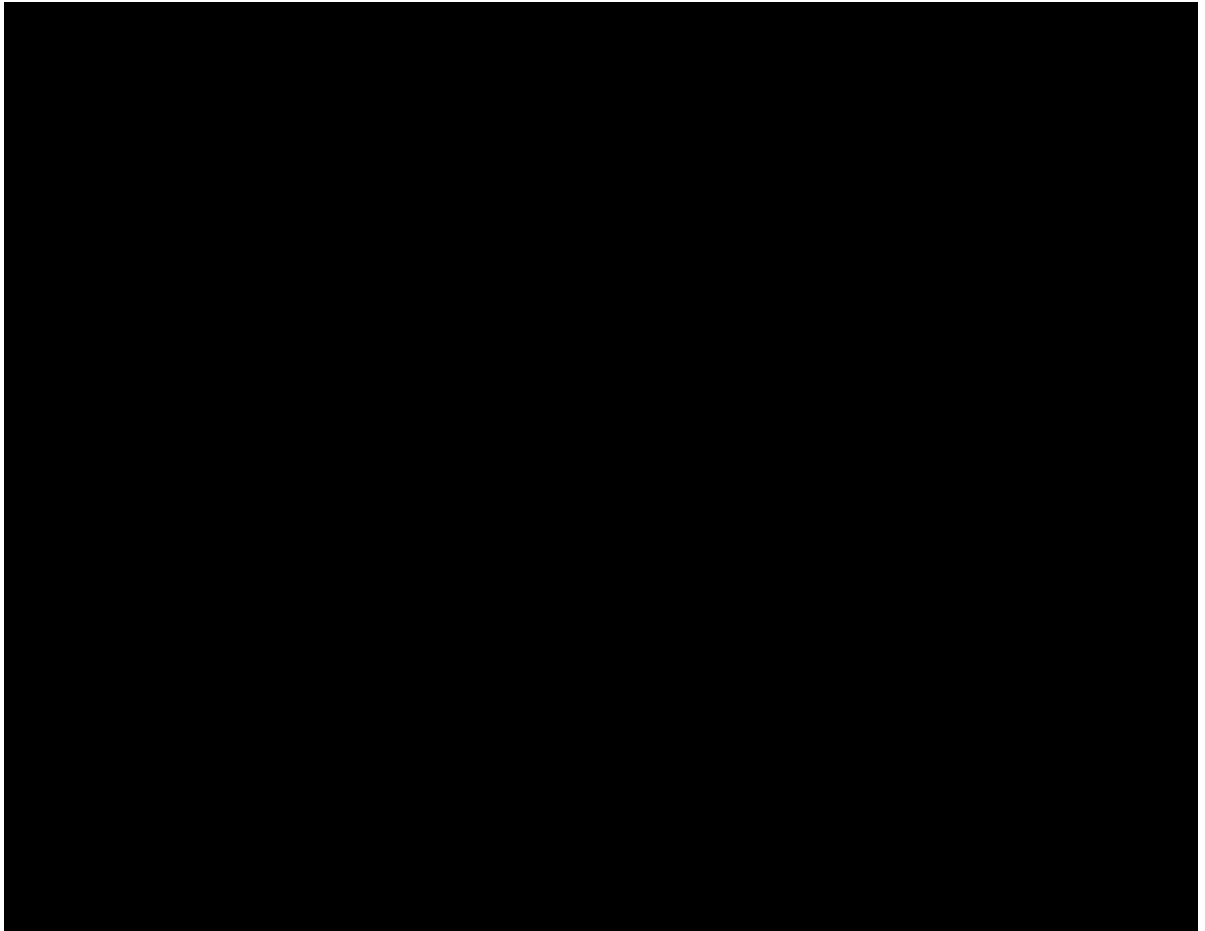


Figure 1.8b. Detail of waistcoat, silk and silver embroidery on satin, France, 1730-39.
252-1906. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

In *L'Art du brodeur*, Saint-Aubin explains each embroidery technique in detail and the degree of skill needed for each. The embroidered waistcoat in figure 1.8a is an example of the height of luxury in the 1730s which could be achieved through a combination of the embroidery techniques explained by Saint-Aubin. Richly embroidered in sumptuous materials including silk, silver thread and spangles, this waistcoat would have been worn to court as part of a suit. The embroidery itself was completed by a highly skilled professional embroiderer proficient in handling the variety of materials and techniques (figure 1.8b). The opulent effect of the variety of textures has been achieved through a combination of three specific techniques. The first of these is *guipure*, a technique which Saint-Aubin described as being executed by a team of specialist embroiderers. Pieces of vellum were first cut out by a male embroiderer, who specialised in this task; he then attached these to the fabric in the shape of the design, securing them in place with small stitches in silk thread. Female embroiderers next covered the shapes in gold or silver

threads.¹⁸ We can see on this garment, that the borders on the edge of the pocket and the waistcoat have been worked in *guipure* embroidery, with the vellum being partially visible underneath the gold thread as the latter has worn away. The second technique used is satin stitch (*passé*), a technique whereby each stitch is repeated underneath the design so as to ensure that the stitches are executed as closely to one another as possible.¹⁹ Despite its relatively simple appearance, Saint-Aubin suggested that it was a difficult technique to perform well, and that generally only professional embroiderers excelled at it.²⁰ Finally, the technique of couching (*couchure*) is used in this piece of embroidery. Couching is achieved through laying several gold or silver threads flat on the surface of the fabric and then stitching over them at regular intervals to hold them in place.²¹ Saint-Aubin suggested that this embroidery technique was the most popular and the least durable.²² This was probably because of the fragility of the silk threads holding the metal threads in place. The silk threads would usually wear away first, with the whole design then becoming detached from the fabric on which it was worked.²³ The large scrolling flowers on this waistcoat are embroidered with a combination of satin stitch and couching work which add to the visual magnificence of the design.²⁴ The combination of embroidery techniques showcased in this waistcoat, each of which entailed a great degree of complexity and specialisation, demonstrates the highly skilled craftsmanship involved in

¹⁸ Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), pp. 15-16. Hereafter *L'Art du brodeur*.

¹⁹ Mary Thomas, *Mary Thomas's Dictionary of Embroidery Stitches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934), p. 179.

²⁰ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, pp. 13-15.

²¹ It is not necessary for couching to be in gold and silver, although Saint-Aubin only refers to gold and silver in his description of this technique.

²² Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, pp. 17-18.

²³ Gail Marsh, *18th-Century Embroidery Techniques* (Lewes: Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd., 2006), p. 42.

²⁴ This waistcoat is discussed in: Avril Hart and Susan North, *Historical Fashion in Detail: The 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: V&A Publishing, 1998), p. 154; Sarah Medlam and Miller, eds, *Princely Treasures: European Masterpieces 1600-1800 from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp. 176-7. It is currently on display in the 'Europe 1600-1815' galleries in the V&A museum which were opened in 2015.

the production of embroidery. The degree of craftsmanship in turn highlights the luxurious and expensive nature of professionally-produced embroidery for court clothing.

By the second half of the century the cut of the coat and waistcoat had evolved so that the silhouette of the suit was slimmer. Nevertheless, embroidery continued to embellish the formal three-piece suit and was still to be found around the edges of the coat, the sleeve cuffs, the pleats, and the pockets. Formal court suits were also typically embroidered in polychrome silks. Stylised flowers in colourful shaded silk embroidery were characteristic of these types of suits, which themselves were made out of patterned silks and velvets from Lyon. Figures 1.9a and 1.9b are an example of the type of formal embroidered suit which was produced from the 1770s onwards. It is a man's court suit made of cut and uncut velvet with a purple, black and pale blue striped pattern. It is embroidered in polychrome silk threads, with the floral design extending along the edges, the sleeve cuffs, and the pockets. The delicately shaded roses, lilies and forget-me-knot-type flowers are skilfully executed in various shades of pink, green, blue and yellow satin stitch, French knots and stem stitch. Chenille, a type of soft, feathery yarn, is incorporated into the floral design and meandering border to create further texture alongside the cream net overlay. The rear of the coat demonstrates the extent to which the back and side pleats were also embroidered. This detail would have offered a flash of colour with each movement of the wearer, possibly drawing attention to and framing the sword, which itself would have been a staple accessory of the male nobility. Formal embroidered suits such as these were worn to court right up until the last days of the *ancien régime*.

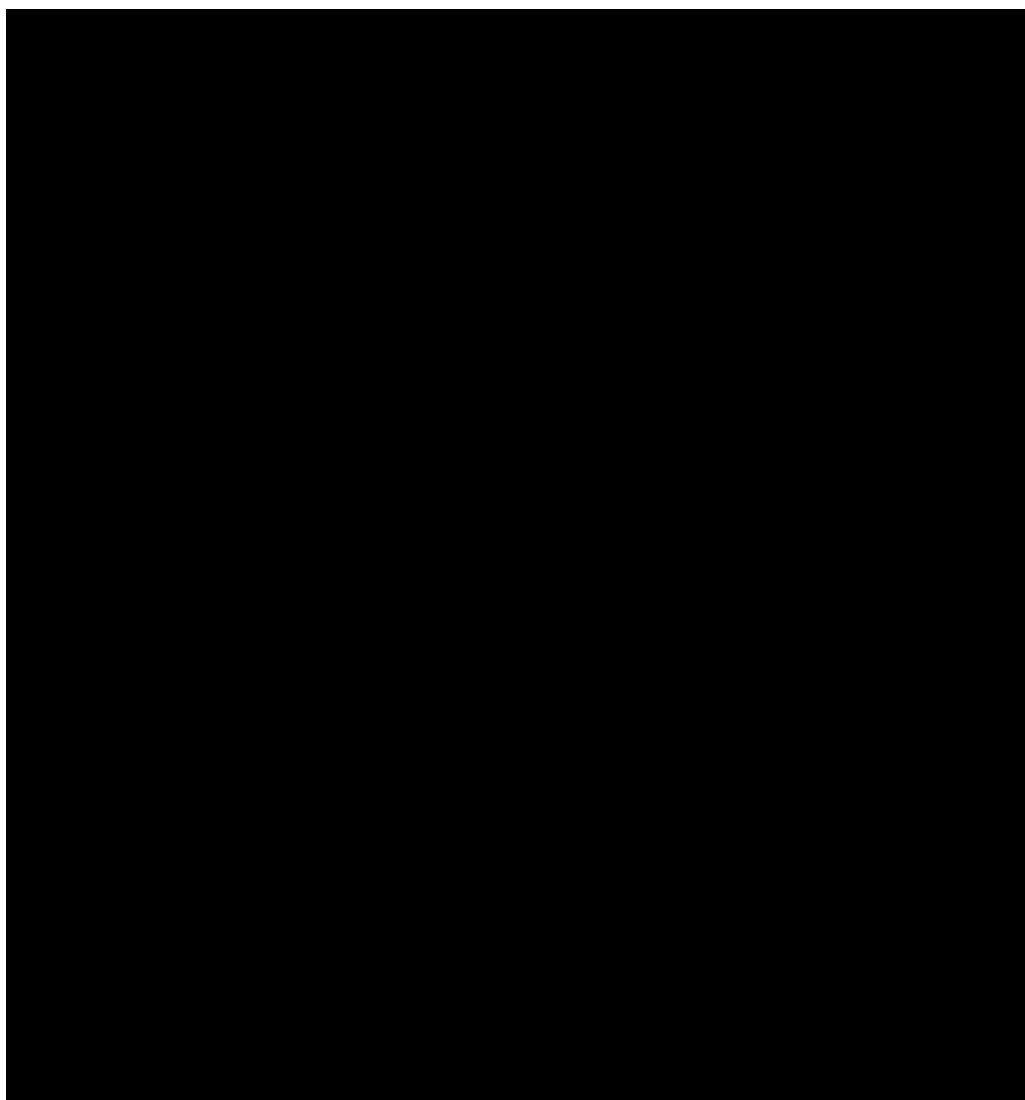


Figure 1.9a. Back of court dress coat, silk embroidery on cut and uncut velvet, France, 1785-95. 652-1898. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

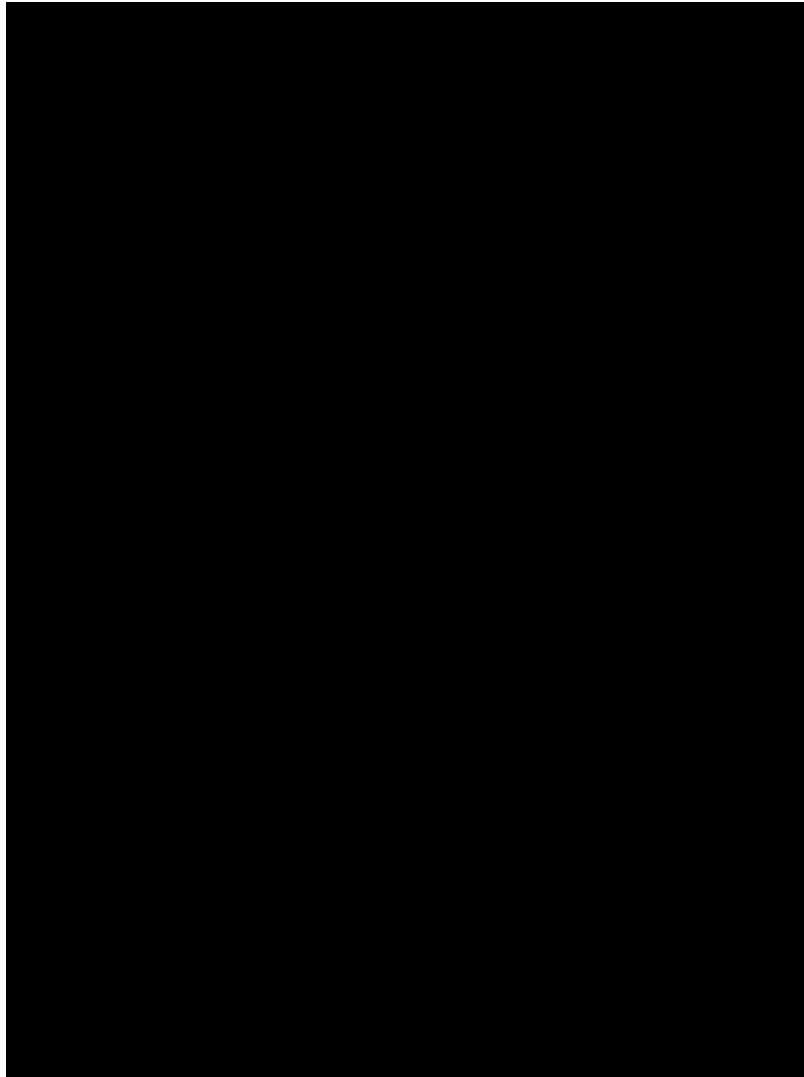


Figure 1.9b. Detail of court dress coat, silk embroidery on cut and uncut velvet, France, 1785-95. 652-1898. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

1.1.2 Women's Clothing

For women too, the cut and style of dress changed less dramatically than its decoration. The wardrobes of elite women contained a variety of gowns for different occasions, with variations in style over the course of the century. The most formal gown, known as the *grand habit*, was worn for appearances at court and remained a staple part of court dress for around a century. Introduced by Louis XIV in the 1690s, it was characterised by its large hoop, closed petticoat and boned bodice (figures 1.10 and 1.11).²⁵ It was the *grand habit* which was the most elaborately embroidered garment in elite female dress during

²⁵ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 90-4.

the eighteenth century. Similar to the male *habit à la française*, the *grand habit* was compulsory for formal court occasions, particularly for presentation to the king and for religious festivities. A variety of silks could be used for the gown, the patterns of which changed considerably over the course of the period. In the first half of the eighteenth century, brocaded silks in a range of colours and expansive patterns were worn as part of formal court wear (as can be seen on the female subjects in figures 1.12 and 1.13), with the most popular in the first half of the eighteenth century being heavy silks brocaded in gold and silver with large floral designs, such as that depicted in Carle Van Loo's 1747 portrait of Queen Marie Lezcinska (1703-68, figure 1.10). By the second half of the eighteenth century, the scale of the pattern had changed and incorporated a smaller and more delicate pattern repeat. The gown of Marie Lezcinska, with its large gold floral pattern and elaborately embroidered stomacher, stands in contrast to the *grand habit* worn by Queen Marie Antoinette (1755-93) in 1778 (figure 1.11). Although elaborately trimmed in bows, ribbons and lace, the gown worn by Marie Antoinette is made of a plain taffeta.

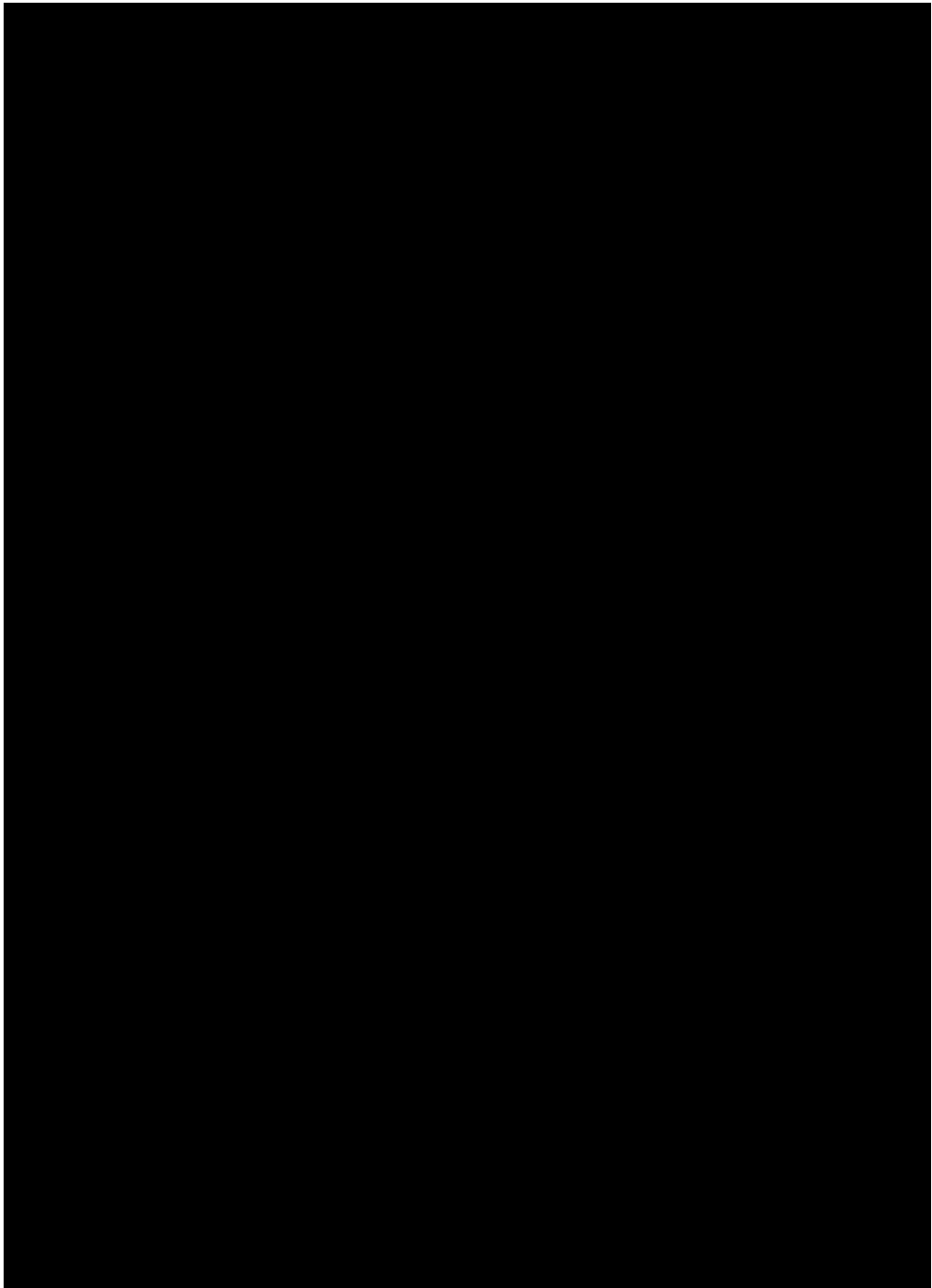


Figure 1.10. Carle Van Loo, *Marie Leszczyńska, Queen of France 1703-1768*, 1747, oil on canvas, 274 × 193 cm, MV 8492 and MR 2570, INV 6281. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN.

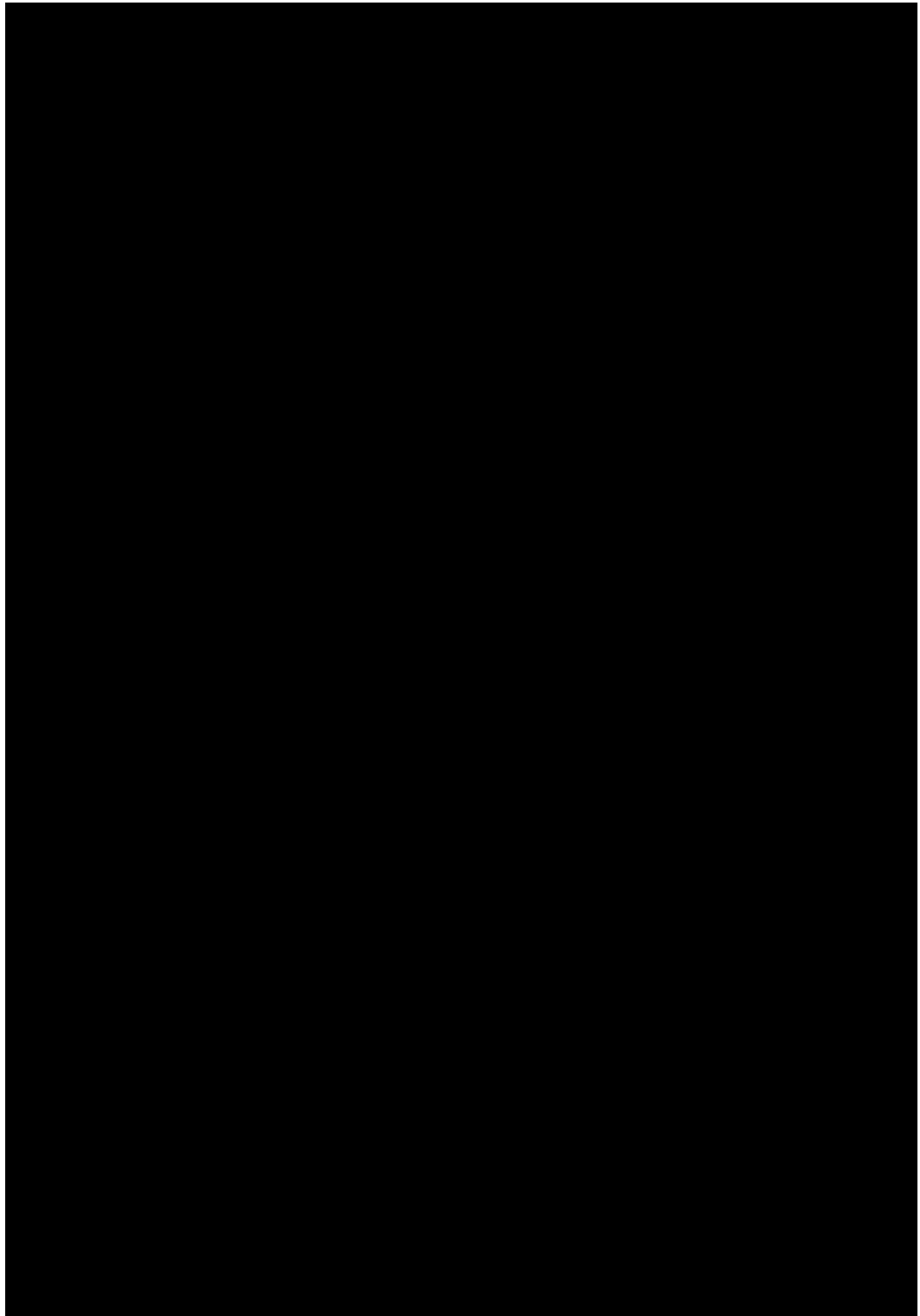


Figure 1.11. Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Marie Antoinette in Court Dress*, 1778, oil on canvas, 273 × 193.5 cm, GG 2772, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Gemäldegalerie.

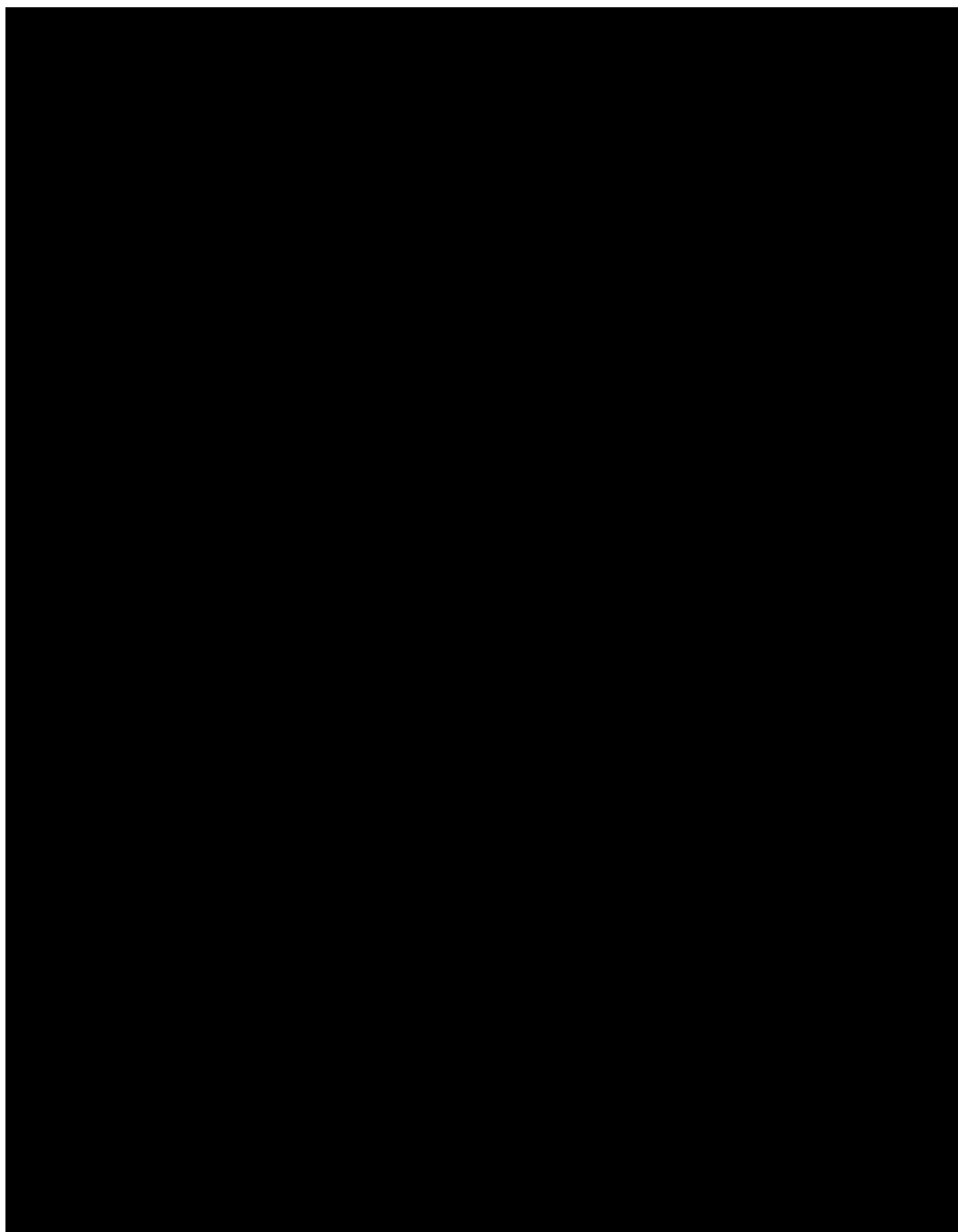


Figure 1.12. Alexis Simon Belle, *Catherine-Eléonore-Eugénie de Béthisy (1707-1767) and her brother Eugène Eléonore de Béthisy (1709-1781)*, 1713-15, oil on canvas, 144 × 113 cm, MV 3733. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN.

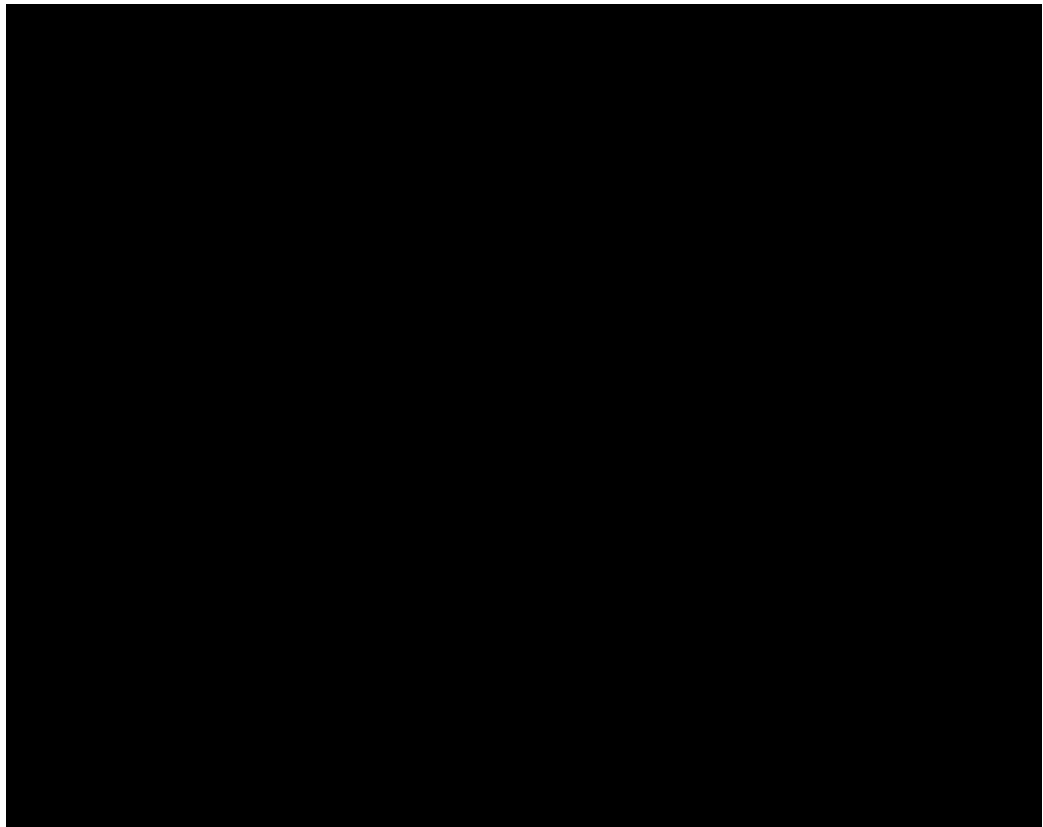


Figure 1.13. Louis Silvestre, *Louis XIV receives the Prince of Saxony Frédéric Auguste at Fontainebleau, 27 September 1714*, 1714, oil on canvas, 120 × 155 cm, MV 4344. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN.

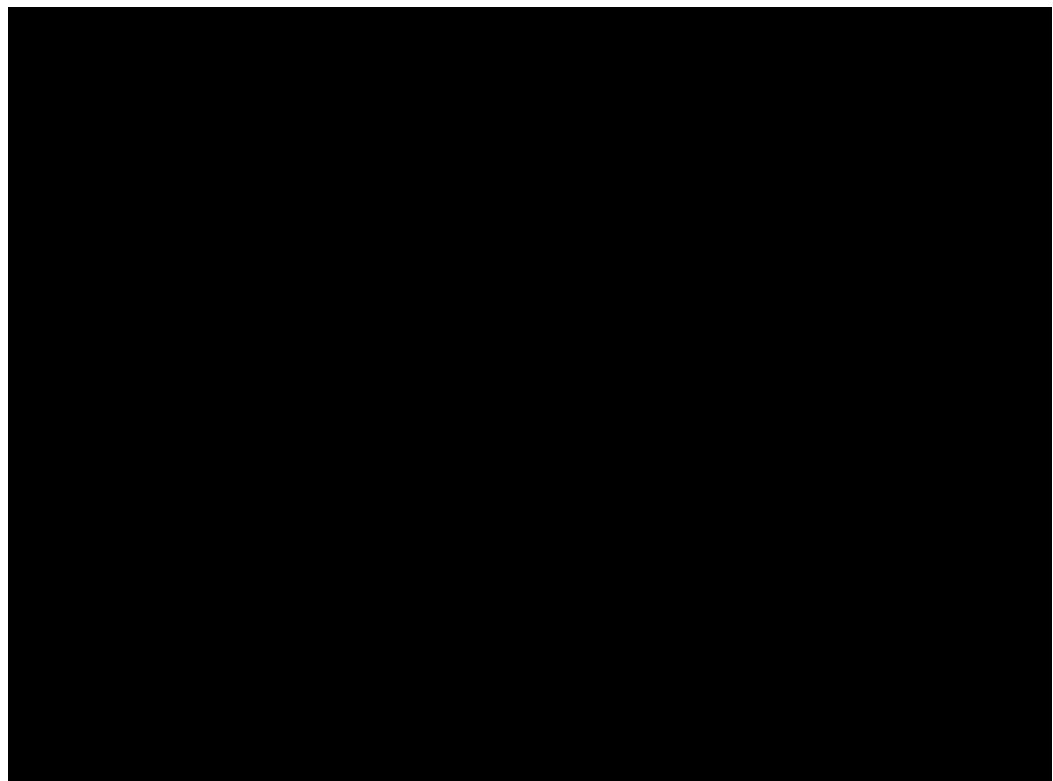


Figure 1.14. Court dress panel, silk, chenille and metal thread embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. T.89-1967. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, gold and silver embroidery became less popular as colourful silks and other materials such as spangles and even feathers, became fashionable in elite circles. The large floral designs of the early eighteenth century gave way to smaller and more delicate motifs which were executed in satin stitch or chain stitch. The embroidered panel in figure 1.14 was intended to form part of the train for a woman's court gown during this period, similar to that in figure 1.15. The embroidery features a naturalistic flower design and swags, which date it to the late eighteenth century and most likely the 1780s. The length of cream satin (188.5 cm long and 75 cm wide) consists of an unmade-up panel which has been embroidered *à disposition* with a design of appliquéd velvet flowers edged with coloured metal threads, sprays of embroidered peacock feathers in shades of yellow, green and blue satin stitch, and swags of padded green and lilac satin. The swags of satin are edged with a serpentine border of swansdown and leaves embroidered in chenille thread. The edge of the shape is curved and has a border of leaves embroidered in shades of green and brown chenille thread with appliquéd velvet flowers and roundels of satin edged with metal purl.

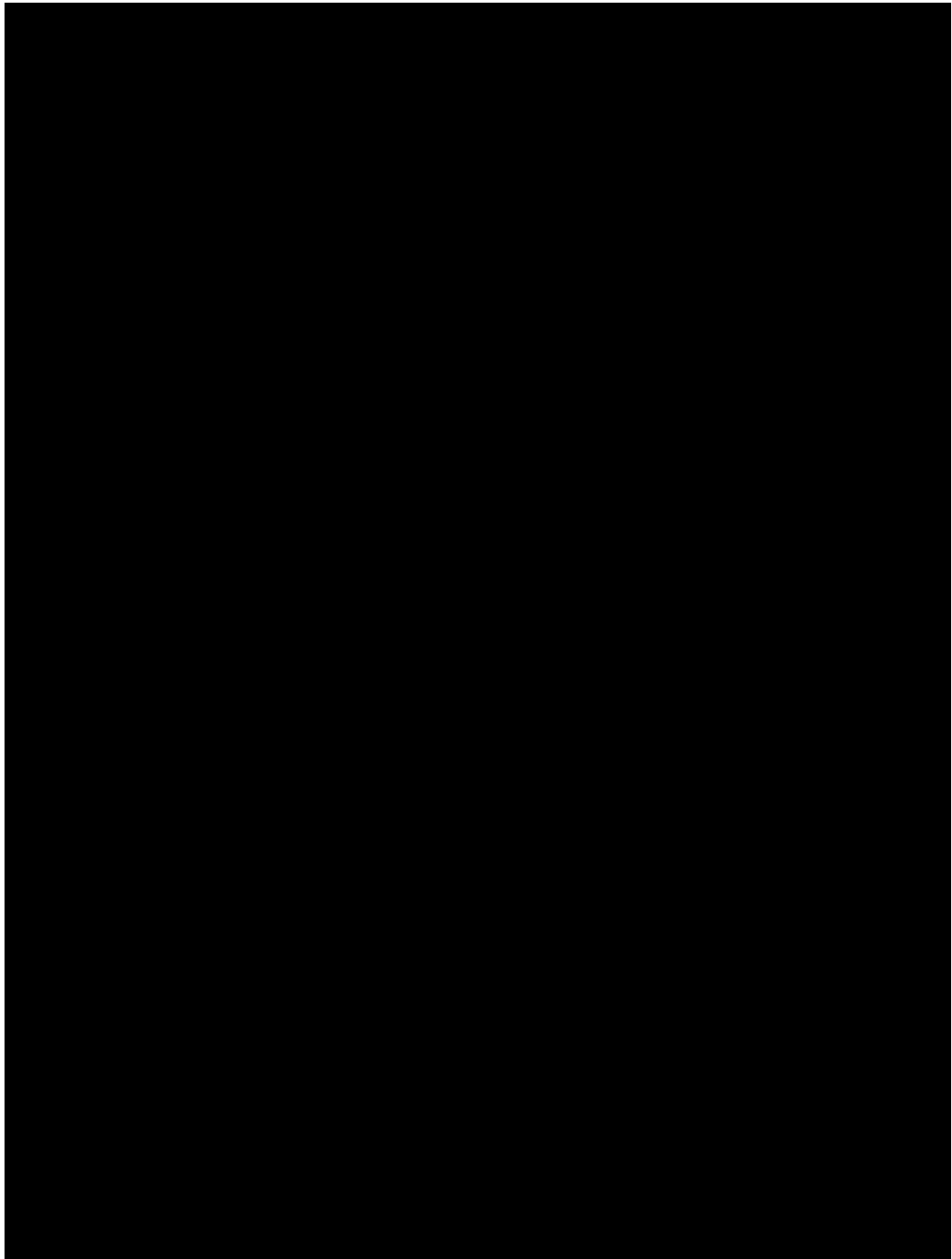


Figure 1.15. *Grand habit* attributed to Marie-Jean “Rose” Bertin, silk and gold thread embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. 925.18.3.A. © Royal Ontario Museum.

Everyday fashionable attire of elite women consisted of a variety of gowns, as well as tight-fitting jackets such as caracos, and bodices. Riding habits were also worn by women during this period and borrowed elements from the male form, such as the coat and waistcoat, which were worn over a petticoat. The *robe à la française* (a term applied

retrospectively to what was known at the time as the *robe battante* or *robe volante*), was a staple of the noble lady's wardrobe during the eighteenth century and could be worn for a variety of occasions, both formal and informal (figure 1.16a). It was originally worn as an informal undress within the privacy of the home, but by the 1720s it had been widely adopted by female courtiers across Europe, replacing the *manteau* (mantua) of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The front of the gown was left open to reveal the petticoat, which could be made of the same or contrasting material as the gown, and the stomacher, which was often lavishly decorated with embroidery or trimmings such as lace and ribbons (figure 1.16c). The cut of the gown was characterised by its box pleats at the back, which fell gracefully from the top of the shoulders to the floor (figure 1.16b). Until the 1770s, the cut of this garment did not change dramatically. As was the case for men's dress, it was the decoration and pattern which constituted the most visual change over the course of the century. Depending on the occasion too, different fabrics were chosen accordingly: damasks and brocaded silk for formal occasions and plainer silks for informal-wear. If embroidery was used, it extended around the front edges of the skirt with the rest of the gown being embellished with ribbons, lace and other trimmings.²⁶

²⁶ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 16.

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Figure 1.16a. Front of *robe à la française*, *gros de Tours*, France, c. 1750. MT 29831. ©
MTMAD.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 1.16b. Back of *robe à la française*, *gros de Tours*, France, c. 1750. MT 29831. ©
MTMAD.

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Figure 1.16b. Detail of *robe à la française*, metal thread embroidery, France, c. 1750. MT 29831. © MTMAD.

The *robe à la française* was depicted by many artists in the eighteenth century, with its elegant box pleats proving attractive subject matter for painters such as Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) and Jean-François de Troy (1679-1752).²⁷ In de Troy's *Declaration of Love* (*La déclaration d'amour*, 1731) (figure 1.17), we are presented with an image of how the *robe à la française*, as well as the *habit à la française*, might have been worn during the 1730s. The woman with her back to the viewer displays the characteristic box pleats of the gown which fall to the floor in a slight train, and is an example of how large floral patterns could be magnificently displayed on these gowns which required expansive amounts of fabric.²⁸ By contrast, her two female companions in the middle of the painting wear a brocaded silk gown in pink and an embroidered white silk gown. The edges of the white gown and its corresponding petticoat are embroidered in silver and complement the silver braiding of her suitor's coat. The centrality of the two lovers, who are the subject of this painting, is suggestive of the importance of embroidery in elite clothing and in

²⁷ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, p. 35.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 38 and p. 43.

formal exchanges of etiquette. The woman in the white gown is the only female figure wearing embroidery, thus foregrounding the importance of the ‘declaration of love’ which is taking place within the formal gardens of a palace.

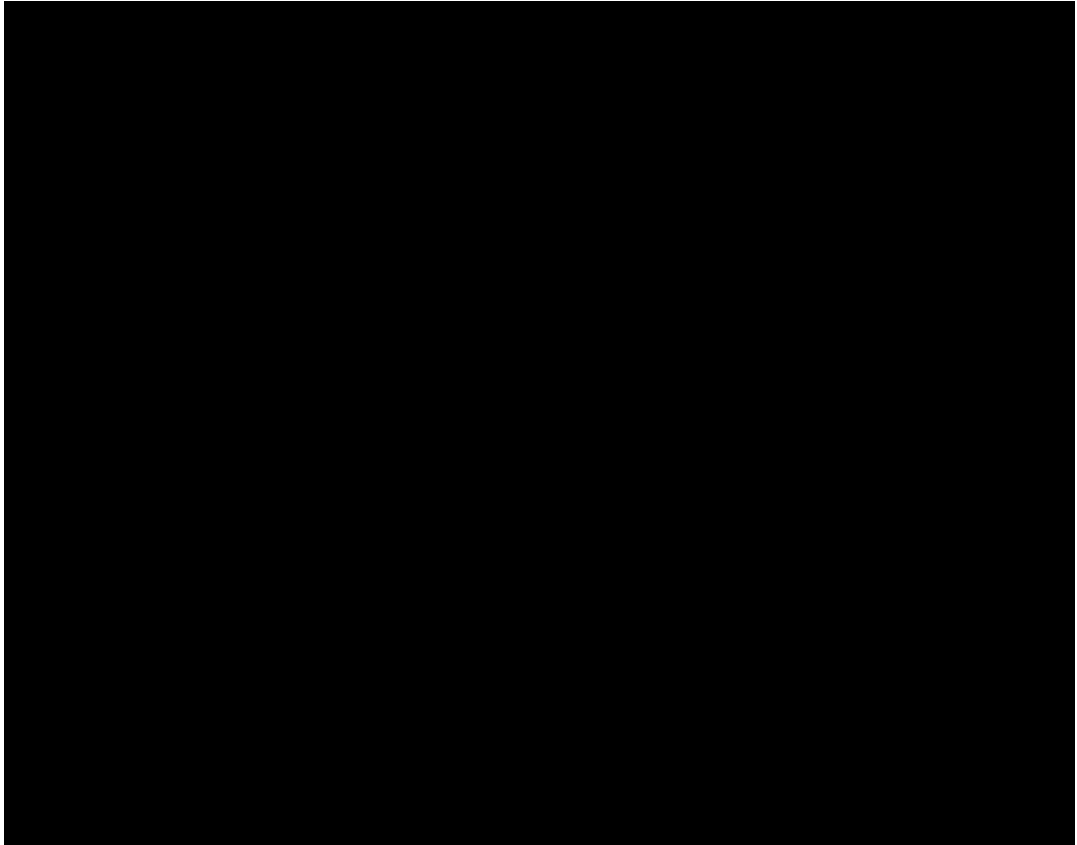


Figure 1.17. Jean-François de Troy, *Gathering in a Park, or the Declaration of Love*, 1731, oil on canvas, 71 × 91 cm, Charlottenburg Palace.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, and as the desire for simplicity increased, what was termed the *robe à l'anglaise* was adopted with enthusiasm by the nobility. The *robe à l'anglaise* developed in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, deriving from the English mantua, which, unlike the French *robe battante*, had the fullness of its pleats sewn down to the bodice. Already by the 1730s, images of the English mantua were being published in France by those such as Antoine Hérisset (figure 1.18). The English mantua was made popular in France by a series of fashion plates by the French engraver Hubert-François Gravelot (1699-1773), which he published upon his return to Paris in the mid 1740s after spending a period of time in England (figure 1.19). The *robe à l'anglaise*, in contrast to the English mantua, was a gown which was seamed at the waist and characterised by its tight-fitting bodice. In contrast to the *robe à la française*, the pleats

at the back of the gown were fitted close to the body, rather than hanging loose from the shoulders (figure 1.20). The skirt opened out at the front to reveal the petticoat. Again, these gowns were generally made out of patterned or plain silks for a variety of occasions. The ways in which the clothing examined above was worn during the eighteenth century were subject to the rules of etiquette which were of vital importance in court environments. The decoration of these garments was a particular concern of court etiquette and the following section will examine how embroidery fit into the parameters of sartorial etiquette over the course of the eighteenth century.

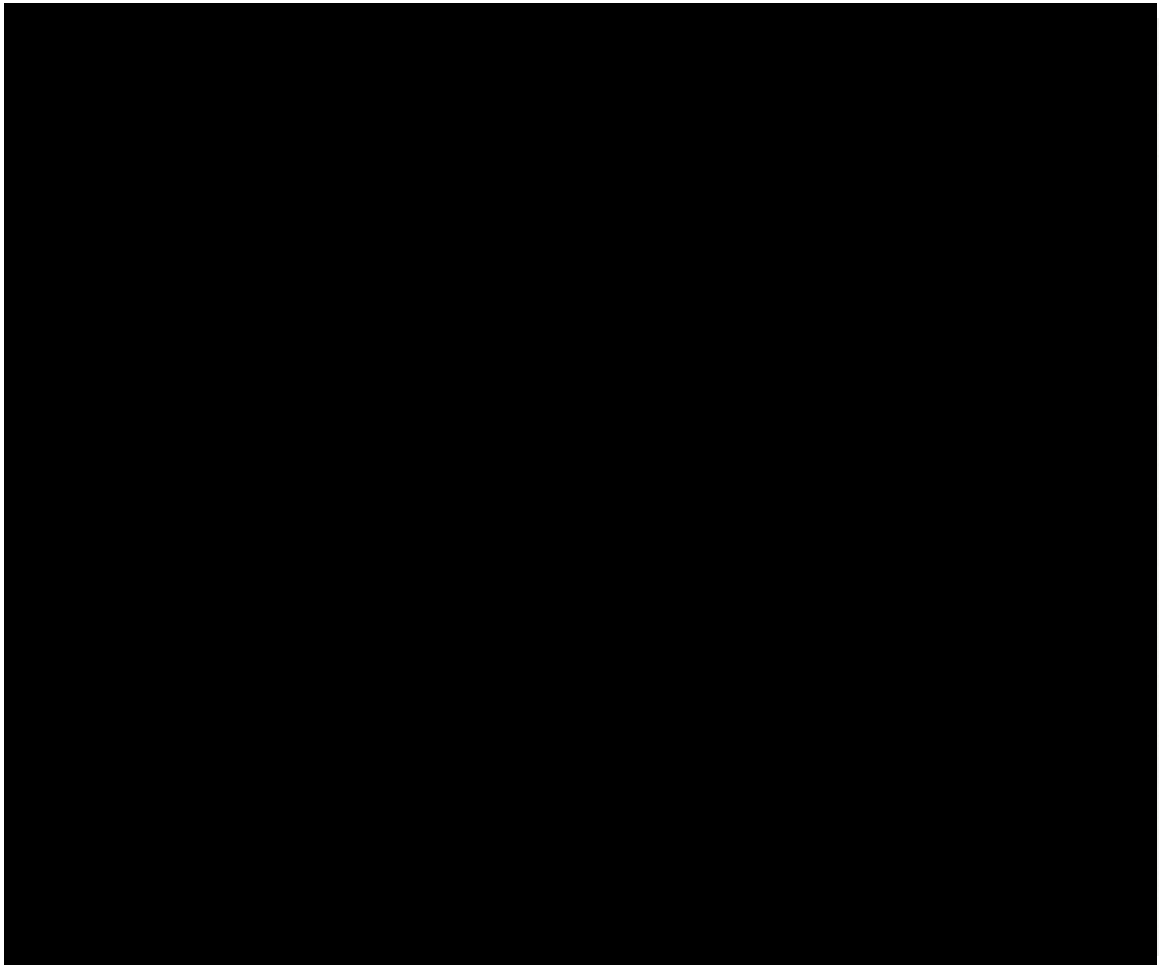


Figure 1.18. Antoine Hérisset, 'Les Manteaux', engraving, 21.7 × 16.7 cm, *Recueil des différentes modes du temps* (Paris: Hérisset, 1729), Plate 4. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Arsenal, EST-368 (407-419).

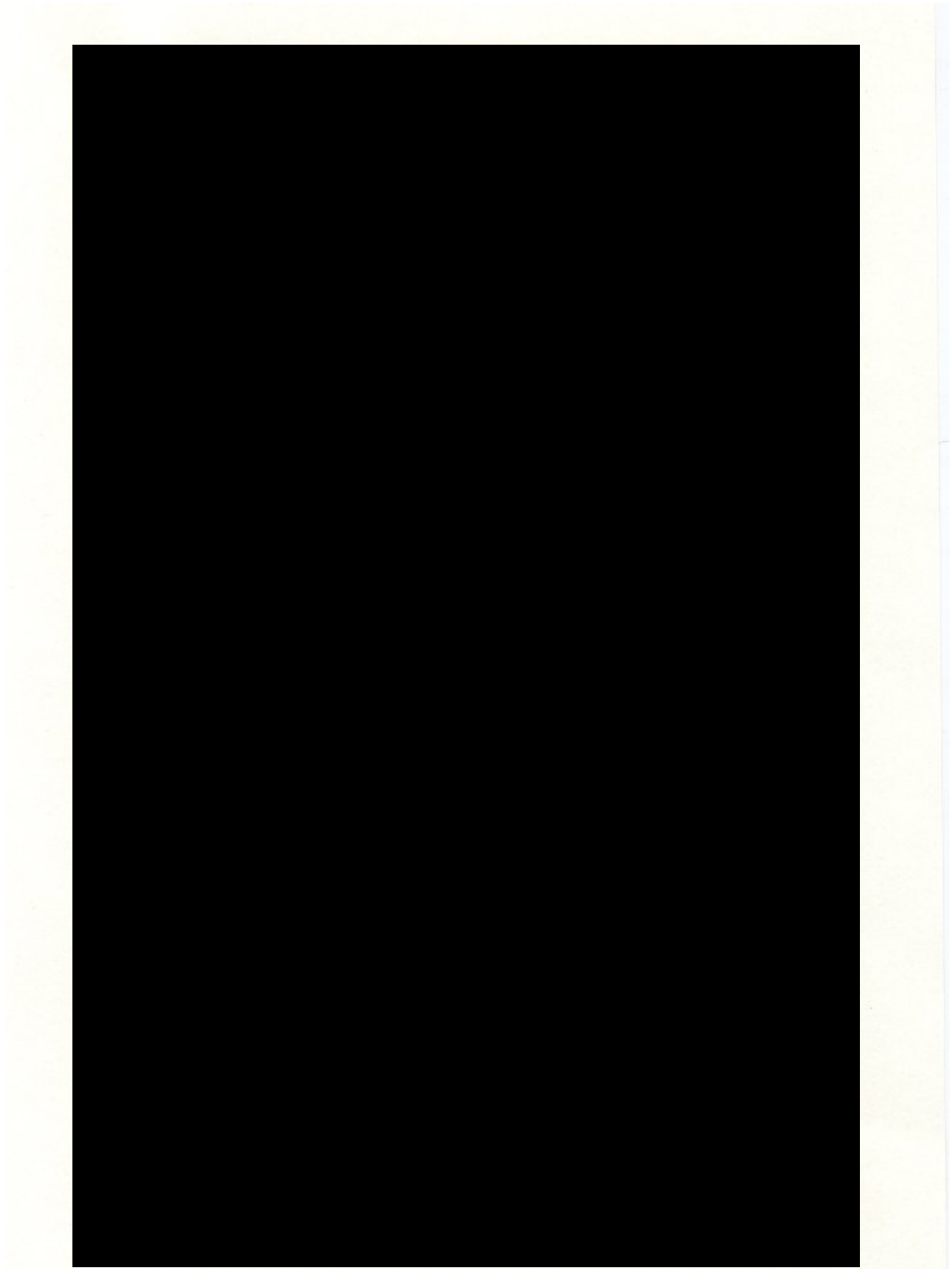


Figure 1.19. Hubert-François Gravelot, etching finished with engraving, 24.6 × 17.2 cm from *Figures de modes* (London, 1744). 1866,0407.300. © 2019 Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 1.20. Back of *robe à l'anglaise*, figured silk, France, 1785-89. C.I.68.57. © 2000–2018 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1.1.3 Etiquette and the Court

In early modern Europe, royal governments had imposed sumptuary laws for centuries which, in theory, restricted the consumption of certain types of goods to particular groups of people. The regulation of dress, accessories, furnishings and even food, sought to impose a material social order in which only those at the highest rank of society were permitted to possess the most expensive and luxurious goods. It was thought that the excessive spending habits on luxurious textiles threatened to destabilise the social hierarchy, the preservation of which partly depended on visual signs of rank and distinction. In a society such as that of *ancien régime* France, the royal government deemed

it necessary to impose sumptuary laws in order to maintain the social order. The extent to which these were effective or necessary has long-been debated by historians.²⁹ In practice, these laws were largely disappearing by the eighteenth century.

Sumptuary laws in France had been promulgated since the medieval period and pointed to a highly stratified social order. The complicated hierarchies found within French society were mirrored in the sumptuary legislation, which was not as straightforward as simply prohibiting the non-noble classes from owning luxury textiles and other expensive goods. Rather 'each order had its badge' and the distinctions within each layer of hierarchy, such as the clergy, the magistrature, and the nobility, were in theory marked by sartorial difference enforced through sumptuary laws.³⁰ These differences were designed to reinforce the stratified social order of the *ancien régime* through visible material hierarchies by restricting the consumption of fabrics, colours and even shape.³¹ Sumptuary legislation enacted by François I in 1543, for example, restricted the consumption of gold and silver embroidery to the royal family, a select group of the nobility, and was one of the 13 sumptuary laws enacted in the sixteenth century. Permission to wear gold and silver embroidery had to be obtained by the king and was perpetuated until the late seventeenth century, as evidenced by the certificates of authorisation (*brevets de permissions*) issued to individuals, such as the Duc de Charost and the Duc de Gesvres in the 1685 and 1687 respectively.³² Permission was granted for them to wear blue embroidered coats, likely to have been worn as part of the specific sartorial etiquette required at the royal family's residence at the Palace of Choisy.³³ Further, during

²⁹ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, pp. 49-52. For Pascal Bastien, the sumptuary legislation introduced between 1543 and 1606 could be taken as the manifestation of a 'power struggle' between the ideals of absolutism and the nobility. See Pascal Bastien, "Aux tresors dissipez l'on cognoist le malfaict": Hiérarchie sociale et transgression des ordonnances somptuaires en France, 1543-1606', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 23/4 (1999), 23-43. See also Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996).

³⁰ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 39.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³² AN O/1/29 (fol. 456): 'Permission de porter un justaucorps bleu en broderie, Duc de Charost', 1685; AN O/1/31 (fol. 46, V): 'Permission de porter un justaucorps bleu en broderie, Duc de Gèsvres', 1687.

³³ Each royal palace had its own 'dress code' which was followed by guests. See Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 113.

the seventeenth century and at the height of Louis XIV's reign, 19 sumptuary laws were enacted, indicating a certain preoccupation with visual signs of rank during this period.³⁴

Yet by the eighteenth century, sumptuary legislation had generally fallen out of use, which questions the extent to which it was ever effective. Only one sumptuary law was passed in the 1700s. Indeed, in his treatise on embroidery Saint-Aubin mused that 'In vain, sumptuary Laws forbade the use of embroidery for different occasions; luxury and industry have always spread it and made it reappear in a thousand different forms.'³⁵ The appearance of the French nobility was regulated in theory by the sumptuary laws, but in practice it was controlled by the visual, and often implicit, codes of etiquette which were embedded in court society.³⁶ In the court society of *ancien régime* France, hierarchy and power governed the actions and thoughts of its members on a daily basis: appearance was everything.³⁷ It was thus etiquette and its codes of sartorial distinction, rather than sumptuary law, which exerted the most power.

The purchasing, wearing and displaying of luxury items, such as embroidery, in order to maintain the expected appearance of one's social status was an important way in which nobles at court sought to maintain or advance their social position, and is what Thorstein Veblen subsequently termed 'conspicuous consumption'.³⁸ Historians of the French nobility and the court have generally acknowledged that vast expenditure by the

³⁴ Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions*, p. 29.

³⁵ 'Envain les Loix somptuaires dans différentes circonstances, en défendirent-elles l'usage ; le luxe & l'industrie l'ont toujours étendue & fait reparoître sous mille formes différentes.' Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 2.

³⁶ The historian Giora Sternberg has noted that there were no fixed rules to regulate behaviour and practices in court life, and that: 'In lieu of positive codification, the system operated largely by customary law: precedents served to determine subsequent occasions. This introduced enough structure and regularity to allow complexity and conscious planning, yet without the rigidity that might have ruled out contention and change.' Giora Sternberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 10.

³⁷ Sternberg has examined the myriad and sophisticated interactions which characterised the incessant pursuit of status in aristocratic society. Sternberg has demonstrated that codes of behaviour and dress were embedded in everyday strategies of individuals at the court of Louis XIV, and that these were often implicit. See Sternberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*.

³⁸ Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925).

nobility on luxury 'status' symbols was a feature of aristocratic life during this period, and that nobles used visible signs of wealth and rank to vie with one another for social distinction. In explaining consumer behaviour and the consumption of luxury goods in eighteenth-century elite society, the work of Norbert Elias has highlighted emulative behaviour as being a particularly important driving factor in France, where the aristocratic court was well developed. Here, members of the court were both part of the extended royal family and involved in the official governing of state affairs. Personal relationships within the court were highly interdependent and the shifting dynamics of power, friendship and rivalry were everyday realities of court life.³⁹ Whether participation in such competition was freely chosen is a matter of debate. Whilst scholarship has traditionally accepted that the nobility was caught up in these extravagant expenditure cycles in order to maintain status, historians such as Giora Sternberg have attributed more agency to the men and women involved in the struggle for social distinction.⁴⁰ For Sternberg, 'the ordering of society was a matter for negotiation and contestation, not just observance or performance.'⁴¹ Rather, 'status interaction' was less a case of the king's domestication of the nobility than a reality of early modern life in which multiple actors had the agency to pursue distinction.⁴²

Elias had attributed the incessant expenditure of court nobles to an 'ethos of rank', whereby members of the court were compelled to consolidate their social position through the consumption of what other social groups perceived to be excessive luxury. For Elias, this ethos was 'not freely chosen' and was necessary to ensure the continuation of the structure found within court society.⁴³ Elias suggested that if an individual did not keep up with the appearance appropriate to their rank, or the one to which they aspired, there was every possibility that they risked losing the respect of their society.⁴⁴ The

³⁹ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰ For traditional interpretations, see for example Elias, *The Court Society*; Roger Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Gail Bossenga, 'Society', in *Old Regime France, 1648-1788*, ed. by William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 42-77.

⁴¹ Sternberg, *Status Interaction during the Reign of Louis XIV*, p. 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴³ Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

glittering sight of a gold and silver embroidered waistcoat, such as that in figure 1.8a, would therefore have signified much more than a fashionable display of luxury. It signified adherence to the expenditure deemed appropriate to one's social rank, and thus the consolidation of one's position within the social hierarchy. Yet the variety of embroidery designs from this period is also suggestive of the degree of autonomy that the nobility had in such 'status interaction'. The purchase of embroidery, as Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis will demonstrate, was not simply a matter of passive participation, but an interactive process in which the consumer had a pivotal role in shaping standards of taste and design, thus corroborating Sternberg's argument that the nobility had greater agency in matters of status and distinction. Embroidery also enabled noble consumers to exercise a degree of aesthetic choice, whilst adhering to the codes and behaviour of the court.

The sartorial codes of the court were reported extensively in the contemporary periodical press. For historians, the *Mercure galant* (published 1672-1791) is a remarkably rich source of eighteenth-century French fashion information.⁴⁵ Whilst generally regarded as a literary periodical, its social commentary on court life and events provides a pertinent insight into the dress and accessories of this social group. Because of its varied content, the publication would have had a relatively broad appeal. The *Mercure* was one of the most popular periodicals in eighteenth-century France, twenty thousand copies per issue being printed at its height in the 1780s.⁴⁶ However, due to the low literacy rates amongst the lower classes in eighteenth-century France, and the expense of subscribing to a journal, readers of contemporary newspapers and periodicals such as the *Mercure* were mainly the

⁴⁵ The *Mercure* was published under three different titles over the course of its publication: the *Mercure galant* (1672-1724), the *Nouveau Mercure galant* (1677-1724) and as the *Mercure de France* (1724-91). The work of Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset has noted the importance of the periodical press to the retailing strategies of merchants in the luxury markets of late seventeenth-century Paris. See Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset, 'A Glittering Reputation: Gaultier's Retailing Innovations in Seventeenth-Century Paris', in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles and Innovation in Europe 1500-1800*, ed. by Evelyn Welch (London: Oxford University Press/Pasold Research Fund, 2017), pp. 169-85.

⁴⁶ Jack Richard Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin, eds, *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France, France* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1987), p. 22.

literate and wealthy social elite of France.⁴⁷ Indeed, it is evident that writers in eighteenth-century France wrote for an educated and literate elite, and certainly for those who could afford to either purchase a subscription or be a member of a political or social club where such publications were available to read. Such publications, it could be argued, also increased the ways in which fashion might be disseminated, encouraging a degree of emulation amongst its readers. The nature of its readership is visible in the content of periodicals such as the *Mercure*, which was made up of literary commentaries, book and theatre reviews, letters and poems. It has been argued that the editors of eighteenth-century periodicals, concerned with profit, included content which was driven by the perceived demand of their subscribers. In doing so, their editorial choices served to reinforce shared attitudes amongst their readers, thus forging a reader social identity based on collective notions of taste and opinion.⁴⁸

Its accounts of social events were often accompanied by detailed commentaries on the clothing of the participants. In September 1679 for example, the Queen of Spain visited Paris, bringing with her an impressive wardrobe which, among other items of clothing, included ‘six Gowns [...], most of which were embroidered’.⁴⁹ During her visit, the Queen made a number of sartorial choices which were carefully observed by the author of the *Mercure galant* and who was particularly impressed with her appearance at a ball thrown by the Marquis of Balbases: ‘The *grand habit* of the Queen of Spain was violet, with an extremely delicate embroidery in gold and silver. She wore a yellow Skirt, completely embroidered in silver. There was nothing but Diamonds on this outfit.’⁵⁰ At the baptism of the Comte de Clermont in November 1711, the Duchesse de Berry wore

⁴⁷ Note that it is nevertheless difficult to pin down the exact size and social composition of the audiences of eighteenth-century French newspapers and periodicals, mainly due to a lack of detailed surviving business and subscription records, although historians such as Censer and Popkin have noted that high price of many journals would not have attracted a significantly popular audience. See Censer and Popkin, eds, *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France*, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Stephen Botein, Censer, and Harriet Ritvo, ‘The Periodical Press in Eighteenth-Century English and French Society: A Cross-Cultural Approach’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23/3 (1981), 464-90 (pp. 468-9).

⁴⁹ ‘six Robes [...], dont la plûpart sont en broderie’. *Mercure galant*, September 1679, p. 358.

⁵⁰ ‘L’Habit de la Reyne d’Espagne estoit violet, avec une Broderie or & argent fort délicate. Elle avoit une Jupe jaune toute brodée d’argent. Ce n’estoient que Diamans sur cet Habit.’ Ibid., September 1679, p. 318.

a gown that cost 9,000 *livres* alone, not counting ‘The Pearls and the Precious Stones which the embroidery was made of’.⁵¹ And in February 1726, Antoine de La Roque who had taken over the re-named *Mercure de France* two years earlier, alluded to the fast-paced and changing nature of fashion in France, declaring that ‘the Fashions are infinitely varied: they renew and multiply constantly’.⁵²

Embroidery was one such fashion which endured continuing popularity throughout the four years that La Roque wrote articles dedicated to the subject of fashion. Embroidery, particularly silk, gold and silver embroidery, was consistently linked with the most fashionable taste of the time. For example, in February 1726 the reader is told of the fashions in men’s coats, with La Roque noting that ‘The most superb are embroidered along all the seams, the pockets, the entirety of the sleeves, & some even the top of the side pleats. That is without speaking of the suits of gold and silver cloth embellished still further with embroidery, with rich epaulettes’.⁵³ Later that same year in May, the reader is told that to be fashionable ‘one always wears Stockings [...] embroidered in gold or silver’.⁵⁴ Embroidery in the *Mercure* was associated with the court and most often included in descriptions of clothing worn by the nobility to public social events, thus reinforcing that gold and silver embroidery was an inherent part of the sartorial etiquette required by the court.

Not all the embroidery described in the *Mercure* was necessarily fashionable however, and we should proceed with caution when ascribing the same values of ‘fashionability’ as the *Mercure* did to these items of clothing. Rather, the individuals on whom the *Mercure* chose to focus for its fashion reports were certainly not representative of French aristocratic society, they were the highest ranked members of the court. As such, the clothing which they wore used the costliest and most elaborate materials. The embroidery of these garments was at the top end of the product hierarchy of the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France. The *Mercure* therefore equated ‘expensive’ clothing with ‘fashionable’ clothing, which was not necessarily the case.

⁵¹ ‘Les Perles & les Pierrieres en faisoient la broderie’, Ibid., November 1711, pp. 187-8.

⁵² ‘les Modes sont variées à l’infini: elles se renouvellent & se multiplient sans cesse.’ Ibid., February 1726, p. 399.

⁵³ ‘Les plus superbes sont brodez sur toutes les coutures, les poches & les manches en plein, & même à quelques-uns, le dessus des plis des côtez. Sans parler des habits d’étoffes d’or & d’argent enrichis encore de broderie, avec de riches nœuds d’épaule.’ Ibid., p. 402.

⁵⁴ ‘on porte toujours des Bas [...] brodez d’or ou d’argent’, Ibid., May 1726, p. 951.

The sartorial choices which were described in the *Mercure* were made to a certain extent by ‘etiquette’. Court life demanded the wearing of a prescribed set of clothing which was traditional and which left little room for individual choice or for the influences of contemporary fashion. As Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell has found, ‘the *grand habit* was a hundred years behind the times. Even at its first appearance in the late 1670s, it was a hybrid of new and old.’⁵⁵ And further that, ‘The cut, composition, and even the colour of the *grand habit* were dictated by etiquette, not fashion. [...] It was considered bad form to wear one twice. This effectively excluded all but the very wealthy from court events: a new *grand habit* could cost anywhere from 900 to 5,800 *livres*.’⁵⁶ Indeed, the order book of Louis Jacques Balzac, embroiderer to the king (*brodeur privilégié du roi*), reveals that he embroidered a court gown in 1760 for the price of 7,540 *livres*.⁵⁷ Expensive embroidery was not necessarily in the same category as fashionable embroidery, as the following section will discuss. There was a type of embroidery which was both cheaper and more ‘fashionable’, but was still consumed by the courtly elite.

Despite the reporting in the *Mercure*, which suggested that gold and silver embroidery was the height of fashion then, this was not necessarily the case by the second half of the eighteenth century. Whilst the *Mercure* was the primary source of fashion news in the opening decades of the eighteenth century and catered to a mainly courtly readership, by the 1780s, a dedicated fashion press had emerged. The emergence of the specialised fashion press was a feature of the growing commercial culture of eighteenth-century France, as the centre of fashion moved away from the court at Versailles to the fashionable elite of Paris.⁵⁸ Fashion journals such as the *Galerie des modes et costumes français*

⁵⁵ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 90.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵⁷ ADP D5/B6/reg.699: ‘Louis Jacques Balzac, Registre des Livraisons d’Ouvrages Commencé le 1er Janvier 1760’, 25 June 1763.

⁵⁸ On the fashion press and the fashion plate in France, see Reed Benhamou, ‘Fashion in the *Mercure*: From Human Foible to Female Failing,’ *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 31/1 (1997) 27-43, p. 35; Jennifer M. Jones, ‘Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime France,’ *French Historical Studies*, 18/4 (1994), 939-67; Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004); Kathryn Norberg and Sandra Rosenbaum, eds, *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV: Interpreting the Art of Elegance* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014); Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, pp. 470-500; Évelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France, des origines à 1848* (Paris: A. Collin, 1966).

(1778-87) and the *Cabinet des modes, ou les modes nouvelles* (1785-86) aimed to inform their readers of the latest fashions being worn in the city. The *Galerie des modes* sought to cater to an increasing public demand for fashion through its fortnightly publications which included engravings of the latest fashions alongside detailed descriptions of the materials and design of the outfit, as well as the social status of the wearer. The publication described its purpose as enabling men and women to both recognise and recreate the latest French fashions, but most importantly, to be ‘in unison with their contemporaries.’⁵⁹ To be up-to-date with the latest fashions was thus to signal one’s belonging to a certain social group, that is, one defined by shared notions of taste in one’s external appearance.⁶⁰ The *Cabinet des modes* served a similar purpose to the *Galerie des modes*, yet it promoted itself as a publication which appealed to ‘all classes of society’, including artists, shopkeepers, and ‘amateurs’.⁶¹

In 1786, the *Cabinet des modes* made a bold claim: that suits embroidered with gold were not fashionable and that they ‘displease[d] and fatigue[d] the eye.’⁶² It is highly likely that these suits were the embroidered court suits examined above. As we have established, court dress – the *habit à la française* or *habit habillé* for men and the *grand habit* for women – was mandatory for court appearances throughout the eighteenth century and continued to be worn, relatively unchanged, until the last years of the *ancien régime* for formal presentation to the king, as well as other special occasions such as royal weddings, baptisms and religious festivities. The following section will examine how embroidery evolved in the second half of the century to become a product associated with the fashionability of ‘new’ luxury and was consumed by the nobility in parallel to the elaborate embroidery of formal court wear.

⁵⁹ ‘à l’unisson avec leurs contemporains.’ *Galerie des modes et costumes français*, 1778, p. 3.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion of what constituted ‘good taste’ in embroidery design and how this was deployed by individuals to signify their belonging to a certain social group.

⁶¹ ‘toutes les classes de la Société’. *Cabinet des modes ou les modes nouvelles*, 15 November 1785, p. 3.

⁶² ‘déplaît à l’œil, & le fatigue’. *Cabinet des Modes*, 1 October 1786, pp. 172-3.

1.2 Fashionable Consumption

1.2.1 Men's and Women's Clothing

By the later years of the eighteenth century, the variety of products produced by the French embroidery trade had significantly increased. These products were generally distributed via the fashion markets of eighteenth-century Paris and their designs were characterised by both their variety and novelty. Furthermore, the materiality of this new 'fashionable' embroidery was lighter and less ostentatious than the gold and silver embroidery produced for formal court appearances, conveying the principles of comfort which were current during the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1770 Saint-Aubin wrote of the continuing penchant for 'sparkle' (*brillant*) amongst consumers of embroidery.⁶³ The 'sparkle' to which Saint-Aubin alluded was to be found in the *paillettes* (spangles or sequins) and paste 'jewels' that were popular in embroidery design from the 1770s onwards and were mainly produced in Lyon around this time.⁶⁴ Figure 1.21 demonstrates the fashionability of this particular style of embroidery in the late 1770s. This fashion plate appeared in the *Galerie des modes* along with the caption 'dressed simply in a crimson velvet *habit français* embroidered all around; the breeches and the waistcoat of gold material are embroidered as the coat with gold *paillettes* in a variety of colours.'⁶⁵ It is here that we begin to see that court dress was not entirely divorced from fashion, and that etiquette and fashion were, to a certain extent, interdependent. The inclusion of a plate depicting court dress in the fashion press is suggestive of the ways in which fashionable embroidery was both disseminated and consumed. As Chrisman-Campbell has argued, the inclusion of court dress in the fashion press was 'an indication of its wider relevance.'⁶⁶ Its inclusion reinforces that it was the court that set the fashions and that court nobles were highly influential in matters of fashion and taste. Indeed, the formal court garments examined above were not worn on a daily basis. There were more

⁶³ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ The types of embroidery that were produced in Paris and Lyon at this time are explained in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

⁶⁵ 'Vêtu simplement de l'habit Français de velours cerise brodé autour; les paremens et la veste étoffe d'or brodés comme l'habit avec les paillettes d'or de diverses couleurs.' *Galerie des modes et costumes français*, 1778.

⁶⁶ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 96.

informal occasions at court where the nobility had more freedom to display fashionable choices in their clothing, and wearing a waistcoat embroidered with the fashionable *paillettes* described by Saint-Aubin and the *Galerie des modes* was one way in which the aristocracy was able to do this.



Figure 1.21. LeClerc and Dupin, 'Monarque juste et bienfaisant' from *Galerie des modes et costumes français* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1778), p. 79. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Réserve des livres rares, RES FOL-LI7-4.



Figure 1.22. Joseph Duplessis, *Portrait of Charles-Claude Flabaut de la Billarderie comte d'Angiviller (1730-1809)*, 1780-89, oil on canvas, 145 × 113.7 cm, KMS7065, National Gallery of Denmark.

Furthermore, from the 1770s onwards embroidery in coloured silks and chenille was the order of the day, and embroidered products such as waistcoats, shoes and accessories were sold in the fashionable shops of Paris, in the rue Saint-Honoré, the Palais Royal, and the surrounding areas. The consumer base for this type of embroidery is more difficult to pin down, since these products had a broad appeal and were generally sold on

a 'ready-made' basis in shops, rather than being ordered as a bespoke product which was tailored to the requirements of the wearer.⁶⁷ The new 'fashionable' embroidery was less expensive than the gold and silver embroidery required for formal court occasions, yet it was not so cheap that all members of society could afford it. Moreover, we know that courtly consumers also purchased this type of embroidery alongside the more expensive embroidery which the sartorial etiquette of formal court appearances demanded.

The late eighteenth-century portrait of Charles-Claude Flahaut de la Billarderie, the comte d'Angiviller, is an example of how such embroidery might have been worn (figure 1.22). The comte d'Angiviller (1730-1809) had a successful military career under Louis XV before being made Director General of the *Bâtiments du Roi* by Louis XVI in 1774, a post which he held until 1791. A close friend of Louis XVI, the count was firmly part of the inner court circle, evidenced by the badge of a chivalric order above his left breast. His place among the fashionable elite of France is further suggested by his attire in this painting.⁶⁸ In this painting, he is wearing a suit made out of pink satin together with a contrasting waistcoat of cream satin, a highly fashionable ensemble during this period. The waistcoat is embroidered in a variety of coloured silks in a delicate floral design similar to that of the waistcoat in figure 1.23. The pastel shades of both the coat and the waistcoat depicted in the painting were part of the taste for lighter colours and embellishment. Such waistcoats, which will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3, were generally sold in the form of panels, embroidered *à disposition*, and bought in the shop of a *marchand mercier* rather than commissioned as a bespoke item directly from an embroiderer. Although not cheap, they were considerably less expensive than embroidered waistcoats in gold and silver, and men of fashion generally owned several of these items.⁶⁹ The count's decision to be portrayed in this outfit suggests his belonging

⁶⁷ The retailing and distribution of embroidery is examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. This chapter includes a discussion of 'ready-made' and the implications that this entailed for the production of embroidery during the eighteenth century.

⁶⁸ The chivalric order which this badge signifies appears to be that of the Order of the Holy Spirit, a French order of chivalry created by Henri III in 1578. It was the most senior chivalric order in France until its abolition during the French Revolution. The production of embroidered badges of the Order of the Holy Spirit and its significance to the embroidery trade which served a courtly clientele, is examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁶⁹ Embroidery prices during the eighteenth century are examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

to the world of fashion. At the same time, the badge of a chivalric order reminds viewers of his place within the realm of courtly etiquette.

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Figure 1.23. Waistcoat, silk embroidery on *gros de Tours*, France, c. 1780. MT 47397. © MTMAD.

As historian Roche has recognised, ‘it is misleading to reduce noble behaviour to the model of those caught up in the whirlwind of luxury expenditure’.⁷⁰ Indeed, not all of the nobility spent vast sums of money on luxury goods, and most importantly, the nobility did not wear extravagant embroidered suits in gold and silver on a daily basis. The gown embroidered by Balzac for the price of 7,540 *livres* was not a daily expenditure. Rather, the consumers of the elaborate embroidered court clothing examined above should also be recognised as the consumers of the new fashionable embroidered products. The

⁷⁰ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 213.

embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France thus served two different markets: that of courtly etiquette and that of fashion. Therefore, a more nuanced approach to the consumption of traditional luxury products is required. The binary nature of elite consumer demand is apparent in the product differentiation of the embroidery trade during this period. The consumer base for fashionable embroidery can be conceptualised as clients with a dual requirement, who were at once required by the sartorial etiquette of the court to consume costly and elaborate gold and silver embroidery, but who on the other hand were drawn to fashionable silk embroidery, the most fashionable of which was produced in Lyon during the second half of the eighteenth century. Based on the material evidence, there are clear aesthetic distinctions within the category of ‘fashionable’ embroidery, with the objects themselves conveying a visual gradation in skill, quality and design.

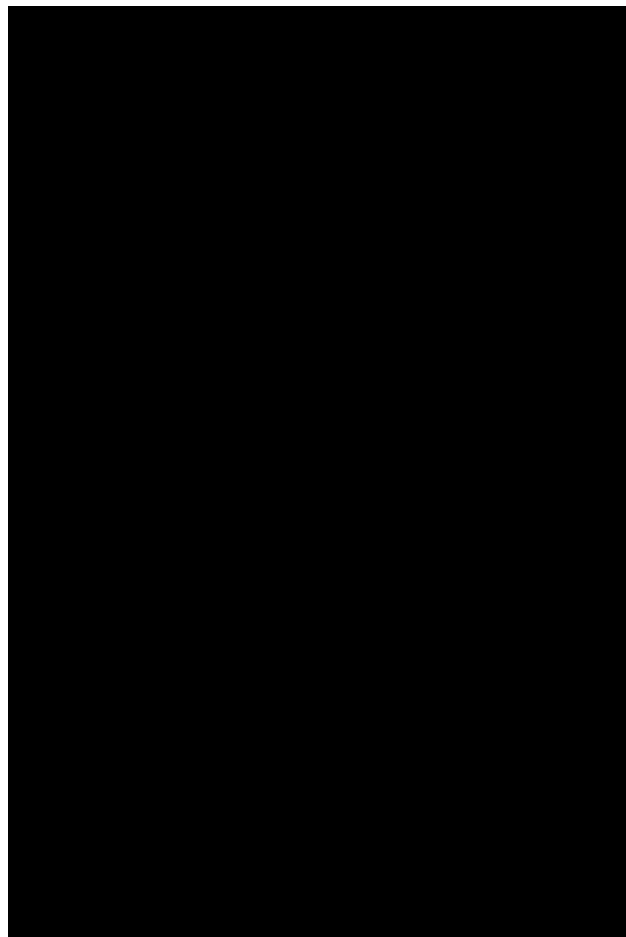


Figure 1.24. Court dress coat, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1770s. T. 9-1967. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Take this embroidered court coat (figure 1.24), for example. Made of cream figured satin, it is delicately embroidered in chain stitch in coloured silk threads. The cut of the coat and the style of the embroidery date the garment to the 1770s, a similar period to the coat in figure 1.9a. Yet the embroidery of this garment is certainly not as ‘heavy’ as the shaded silk embroidery of figure 1.9a and both the lightness of the satin and the delicacy of the embroidery point to the relative informality of this coat. The impracticality of the material also indicates a lifestyle that did not involve getting dirty and reminds us of the elite status of the wearer. This object is suggestive of how court dress reflected new tastes in design during this period and how it did not eschew fashion entirely. On the one hand, the cut and style of the garment conforms to the silhouette of the male *habit à la française*, yet on the other the embroidery signifies the desire of the individual to indulge in the fashions of the day. The embroidery design on this coat would have been highly fashionable and reflects the trend for small-scale, delicate floral decoration. The swags, bows and flowers are all embroidered in shades of pink, green, blue and yellow. The subtle shading effect has been achieved through tambour embroidery. Tambour embroidery was a technique introduced in France from Asia in the 1750s.⁷¹ The technique involved using a round frame to keep the fabric taut, with a hook being used instead of a needle to produce a chain stitch (figure 1.25). A rectangular embroidery frame could also be used with a tambour hook by amateur embroiderers, as indicated by the portrait of Madame de Pompadour by Drouais in 1763-4 (figure 1.26). The tambour technique enabled embroiderers to execute designs in chain stitch with greater precision, and with greater speed and efficiency. As was usual for the coat, the insides of the pleats were embroidered in the same design as the rest of the coat. This attention to detail suggests that this was by no means a ‘cheap’ garment, but instead was a fashionable variation of

⁷¹ Saint-Aubin states that the tambour frame was introduced in France from China in 1759. Whilst the exact date of its introduction is unknown, it is thought that tambouring was introduced in Europe in the 1760s from Asian countries such as India and China. Ribeiro suggests that it was introduced from Turkey, see Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, p. 75. The tambour frame is round in shape and a hook is used instead of a needle to produce a chain stitch. Figure 20 shows Madame de Pompadour sitting at an embroidery frame, yet the hook in her hand shows that she is, in fact, tambouring. This portrait reflects the popularity of tambouring as a polite accomplishment.

the lavishly-embroidered garments found at court. It is here where we can see the influence of fashion on court clothing in the late eighteenth century.⁷²

⁷² Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 96.

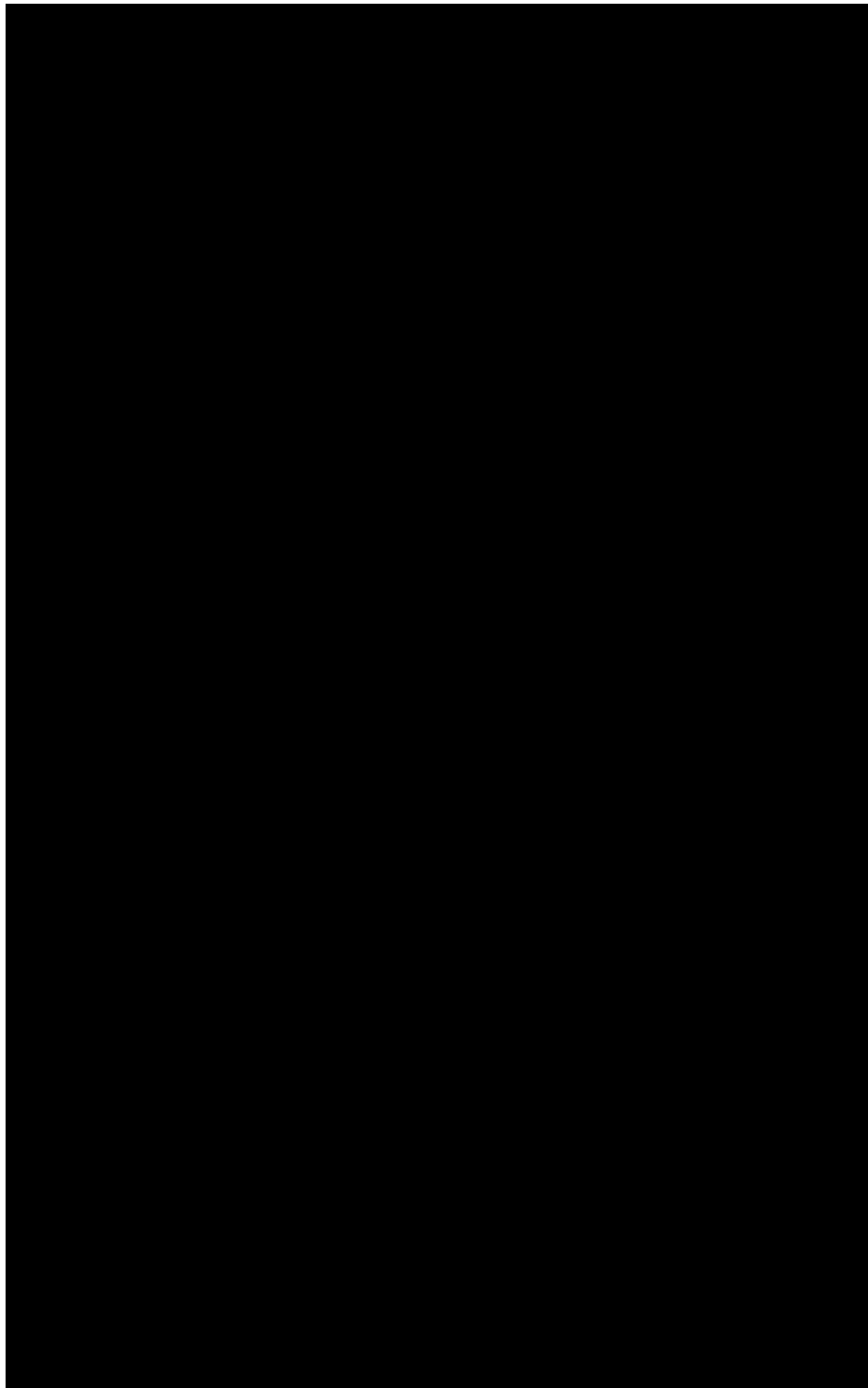


Figure 1.25. 'Brodeur', from Diderot and D'Alembert,
Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers,
Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques: avec leur explication,
Plate 2, Book II, Part I (Paris: Briasson, 1762-72). AE25.E53 1751 Q. © 2000–2018
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

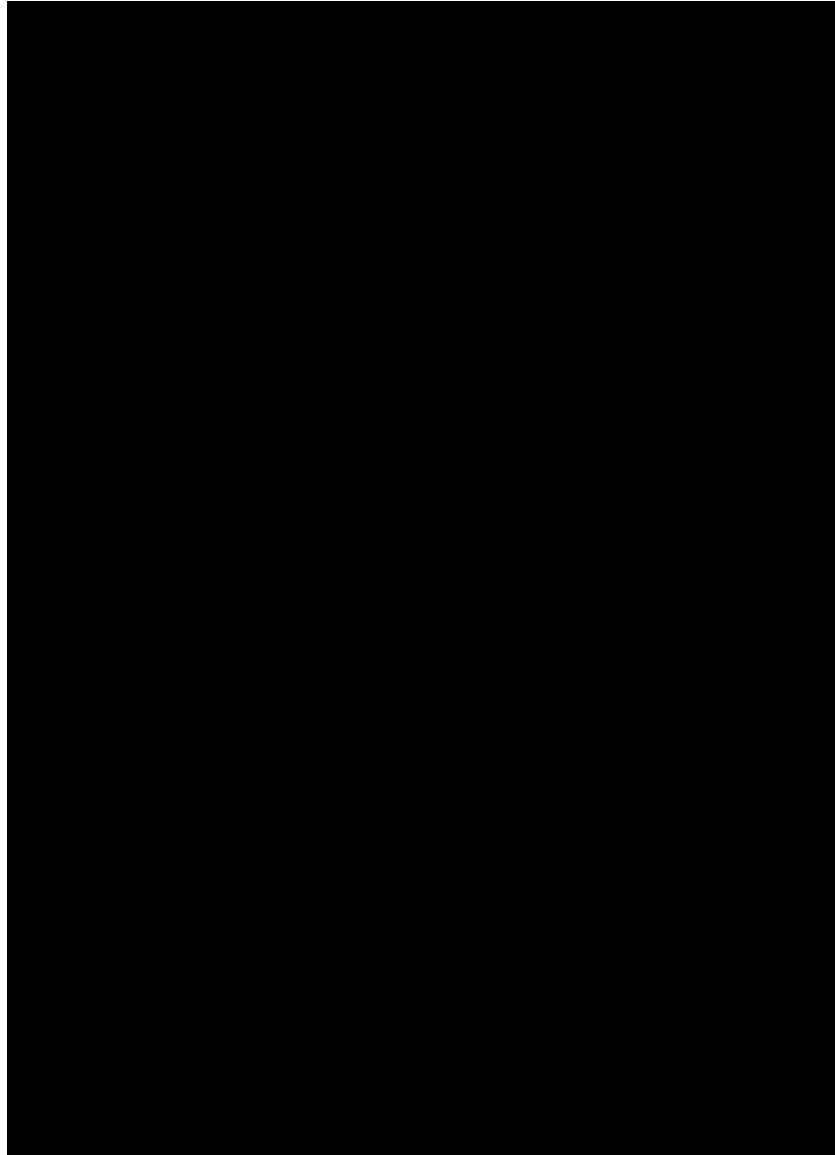


Figure 1.26. François-Hubert Drouais, *Madame de Pompadour at her Tambour Frame*, 1763-4, oil on canvas, 217 × 156.8 cm, NG6440, © The National Gallery, London 2019.

For less formal occasions and certainly by the later years of the eighteenth century, it was no longer necessary for the three pieces of the suit to match. Rather, it was usual for gentlemen to purchase plainer coats and breeches, opting instead to update their outfit more regularly with several different embroidered waistcoats, similar to that worn by the comte d'Angiviller in figure 1.22. In this way, the waistcoat became the focus of the outfit and invariably, the embroidery was an extremely obvious way of varying one's wardrobe. From the 1770s onwards, colourfully-embroidered waistcoats were particularly fashionable among elite gentlemen and it was usual for men of this social standing to own

several. This explains the popularity of the embroidered *gilet*, whose designs varied enormously, granting the discerning consumer a great degree of choice. The *gilet* was made out of white silk (usually satin or *gros de Naples*), as well as other textiles such as dimity, and was embroidered in brightly coloured silks. Figures 1.27 to 1.29 show a selection of the types of designs which were fashionable during the last decades of the eighteenth century. The most popular designs were floral, but the 1780s also saw the emergence of the ‘pictorial’ waistcoat as a high-end fashion garment. These were waistcoats which featured animal and landscape motifs, as well as contemporary topical and political scenes.⁷³

⁷³ The design variety of these types of waistcoats is examined in detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. See also: Sarah Piettre, ‘An Iconographical Study of 18th Century Men’s Waistcoats from the Collection of the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris’, *Text*, 43 (2015), 27-32; Macushla Goacher Baudis, ‘Embroidery for Male Suiting and Waistcoats in Lyon, 1780-1789: A Cultural Biography of the Designs in the National Museum of Ireland Collection Presented by J. H. Fitzhenry’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, National College of Art and Design, Dublin, 2008).

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 1.27. Waistcoat (*gilet*), silk embroidery on *gros de Tours*, France, 1780s. MT 49574.

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[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 1.28. Waistcoat (*gilet*), silk embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. MT 30014. ©

MTMAD.

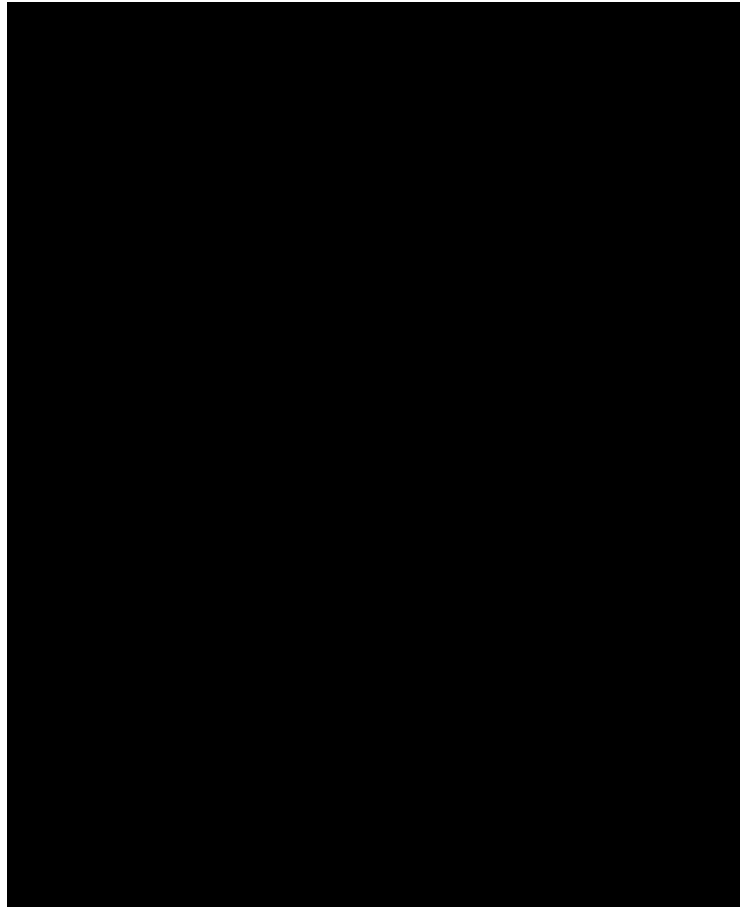


Figure 1.29. Waistcoat (*gilet*), silk embroidery on *gros de Tours*, France, 1780s. T. 212-1972. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

For women too, a new style of ‘lighter’ embroidery emerged towards the second half of the century. In contrast to the opulent embroidery of the *grand habit*, the embroidery in figure 1.30 seems much more demure. Yet this piece of clothing was not necessarily consumed by a woman of a different social status. On the contrary, it was likely to have been worn by a lady of a similar social standing, but for a different purpose. This garment is a woman’s *robe à la piedmontese*, a fashionable variation of the *robe à la française*.⁷⁴ The embroidery, which decorates the sleeve, shoulders, petticoat and back, is extremely delicate and executed in various shades of coloured silk threads. The floral and foliage motifs are embroidered in subtle shades of pink, blue, green and yellow satin stitch, with French knots and small leather daisy cut-outs which are held in place with small with cream stitches. There are long elongated sprays of flowers and foliage and smaller flower motifs adorn the fabric. The larger sprays of fantastical flowers are

⁷⁴ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 21.

connected by thin stems or ribbon-like features, all in shades of different coloured silks. The delicate embroidery of this gown can be compared with the scale of the embroidery of the male suit in figure 1.24 and similarly signals a change in fashionable taste at court. Its small-scale floral design would have been extremely fashionable in the late eighteenth century and would probably have been worn for a more informal courtly occasion, rather than a formal court event.

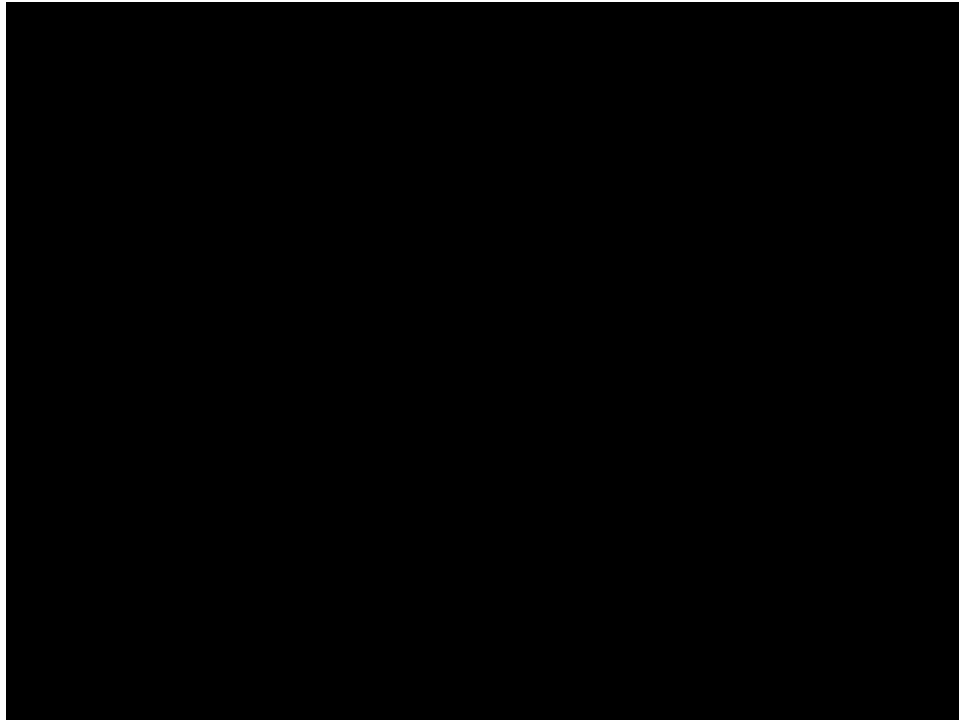


Figure 1.30. Detail of *robe à la piedmontese*, silk embroidery on silk, France, 1780-89. T. 725-1913. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

1.2.2 Fashionable Embroidery: A Male Phenomenon?

The increased consumption of fashion in the eighteenth century has, for the most part, been associated with women. Contemporaries denounced the spending habits of women as both frivolous and immoral, whilst historians have tended to focus on the consumption habits of women, particularly when examining fashion and dress.⁷⁵ Findings from

⁷⁵ The consumption habits of men are gradually being brought further into the foreground. See for example: Margot Finn, 'Men's Things: Masculine Possession in the Consumer Revolution', *Social History*, 25/2 (May 2000), 133-55; Peter McNeil, *Pretty Gentlemen: Macaroni Men and the Eighteenth-Century Fashion World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018).

research on inventories reveal that the value of the wardrobes of women of the middling ranks tended to be higher than that of their male counterparts. However, the same did not apply to those of the nobility and the elite classes. Roche's study of Paris inventories has demonstrated that throughout the eighteenth century, men and women of the Parisian nobility spent equal amounts on clothing.⁷⁶

For women, embroidered clothing often included gowns, petticoats and stomachers. Evidence from Roche's study suggests that women's gowns were the least common garment in Parisian inventories and were to be found only in the wardrobes of the upper ranks of society: 'The gown, which is so prominent in histories of the costume of this period was in practice rare and select'.⁷⁷ Indeed, archival evidence points to the expensive nature of embroidered gowns and suggests that they were ordered with less frequency than embroidered suits and waistcoats for men. In Balzac's order book for the years 1760-2 for example, just one piece of female clothing was ordered, the aforementioned gown which cost 7,540 *livres*. The low number could partly be due to the ephemeral nature of the court gown, which was often altered and re-purposed by seamstresses and the *marchandes de modes* to create a new garment for a different court appearance.⁷⁸ This ephemerality also goes some way to explaining the absence of gowns in Roche's study.

Embroidery, it could be argued, was a form of decoration particularly favoured by men in the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ The work of Danièle Véron-Denise has previously highlighted the importance of embroidery, especially for men's garments, in court

⁷⁶ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, pp. 112-3. See also Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, pp. 56-7.

⁷⁷ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 124.

⁷⁸ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 100.

⁷⁹ Although her work is on decoration within the context of interiors, Katie Scott argues that decoration decisions made by the nobility were not made out of individual choice or desire, but rather according to 'social convention and cultural practice'; further, that such decisions were informed by 'shared social and aesthetic values.' See Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 7. Scott also highlights that decoration in the eighteenth century was an important way in which noble men in particular sought to maintain or advance their social position; that the noble hierarchy was in a constant state of flux and 'subject to competitive pressures.' Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, p. 101.

clothing.⁸⁰ Evidence for the popularity of the embroidered waistcoat in the second half of the eighteenth century exists in the abundance of both archival sources and object sources, both of which will be extensively drawn upon in the course of this thesis. According to Roche, the waistcoat was found in 94 wardrobes out of 100 amongst the nobility in 1700. This figure was not significantly higher than for other social categories in Roche's study. Whilst waistcoats were found in 65 wardrobes of wage-earners, they were found in 90 of the wardrobes of artisans and shopkeepers.⁸¹ By 1789, this number for the nobility had risen to 100, whilst for wage-earners it was 86, for artisans and shopkeepers 91, and finally, for the professions, 100.⁸² These figures are for the skirted waistcoat, or *veste*. The *gilet*, by contrast, did not appear in Roche's inventories until 1789.⁸³ This particular garment enables us to examine the consumption habits of the male nobility who were on the one hand, bound by the codes of etiquette found within the more traditional embroidered *veste* and coat, and on the other, the new fashionable straight-cut *gilet* of the 1770s onwards. The figures from Roche's study suggest that the new *gilet* was not a staple of all male wardrobes. On the contrary, we can see that whilst these waistcoats were found in all the wardrobes of the nobility in Roche's study on the eve of the Revolution, only 51 percent and 56 percent of the wardrobes of wage-earners and artisans and shopkeepers respectively contained such waistcoats, and just 30 percent of the wardrobes of the professions. The new *gilets* were evidently more popular with the elite classes, suggesting that this was not an item of fashionable clothing that was widely consumed by all classes of society. Furthermore, Roche has already demonstrated that the consumption of *gilets* was in some respects, generational. For example, the marquis de Montesquiou bought 46 waistcoats (*vestes*) and 17 *gilets* between 1772 and 1778; yet his son bought 26 waistcoats (*vestes*) and 25 *gilets* between 1780 and 1787.⁸⁴ By the late eighteenth century, the *gilet* was considered to be a fashionable staple of the wardrobes of young elite men.

⁸⁰ Danièle Véron-Denise, 'La broderie des costumes de cour en France de Louis XIV à Louis XVI', in *Fastes de cour et cérémonies royales. Le costume de cour en Europe 1650-1800*, ed. by Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel and Pascale Gorguet-Ballesteros (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2009), pp. 90-7 (p. 90).

⁸¹ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 121.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

The high incidence of waistcoats in elite male wardrobes suggests the frequency with which men purchased this garment. It also suggests that male embroidered clothing was considerably cheaper than female embroidered clothing, particularly if men could afford to purchase such waistcoats ‘by the dozen’.⁸⁵ This makes sense, if we consider the evidence from Roche’s study that shows that women’s gowns were a rarity, and that clothing of this nature required significantly more material than a suit. A woman’s gown required around 19 ells of material, compared to seven ells for a man’s suit.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the increased consumption of the waistcoat has implications for its production. Whilst women’s gowns were for the most part bespoke and fitted to the wearer, waistcoats were generally bought as panels or shapes, ready to be taken to a tailor to be made up into a waistcoat according to individual measurements.⁸⁷ Embroidered waistcoats formed an important part of the materiality of elite male fashion. In the new world of consumer goods of the eighteenth century, variety, choice and novelty were essential factors in the driving force behind consumption habits. The embroidered waistcoat, which was available in a variety of designs, styles, materials and prices, enabled consumers to display these fashionable choices, and these consumers were located across Europe.

1.2.3 International Consumption

Consumers of French embroidery were not always local to the French market, but were drawn from the fashionable European elite. Saint-Aubin tells us that French embroidery was highly sought after by foreign customers, noting that they preferred French embroidery to that of their own country, seduced by ‘the novelty of the materials, the variety of designs & the beauty of the execution’.⁸⁸ Indeed, we know that France was the inspiration for all things fashionable during the eighteenth century. The wearer of the

⁸⁵ As the baronne d’Oberkirch, the famous court commentator, commented in 1788. Quoted in Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 238. See also Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Miller, ‘Les matériaux du costume de cour’, in *Fastes de cour et cérémonies royales*, pp. 78-89 (p. 79).

⁸⁷ The concept of ‘ready-made’ in relation to ready-embroidered waistcoat panels is explored in Chapter 3.

⁸⁸ ‘la nouveauté des matieres, la variété des dessins & la beauté de l’exécution’. Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 4.

waistcoat in figure 1.31 was said to be Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803), a British diplomat who served as Ambassador to the court of Naples from 1764-1800.⁸⁹ During this time, Hamilton's principal remit was to foster better commercial relations between Britain and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.⁹⁰ Until the French Revolution, however, Hamilton's diplomatic endeavours were dwarfed by his 'growing reputation as a host and guide to a city whose mysteries had by the end of the eighteenth century made Naples one of the most sought after stations on the itineraries of the European Grand Tour.'⁹¹ Hamilton was evidently a man of fashion and thus concerned with wearing the most up-to-date styles when receiving his elite guests fresh from the Grand Tour. Consumers such as Hamilton were wealthy and well-connected, holding distinguished positions as diplomats, for example.

⁸⁹ See VAM 2728/2382: 'Registered Papers' and online catalogue entry for T.231a-1917. Object was bequeathed to the V&A museum in 1917 by C. A. Beavan.

⁹⁰ Hamilton became a Member of Parliament in 1761 before being appointed as Ambassador to Naples in 1764. As well as his political duties, he exercised a keen interest in art and antiquities and studied the volcanoes and earthquakes of southern Italy. After the death of his first wife, Catherine Hamilton, he married Emma Hart in 1791 who would later become the mistress of Lord Horatio Nelson.

⁹¹ John A. Davies, 'Introduction', in *The Hamilton Letters: The Naples Dispatches of Sir William Hamilton*, ed. by John A. Davies and Giovanni Capuano (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd.), pp. 1-30 (p. 1).

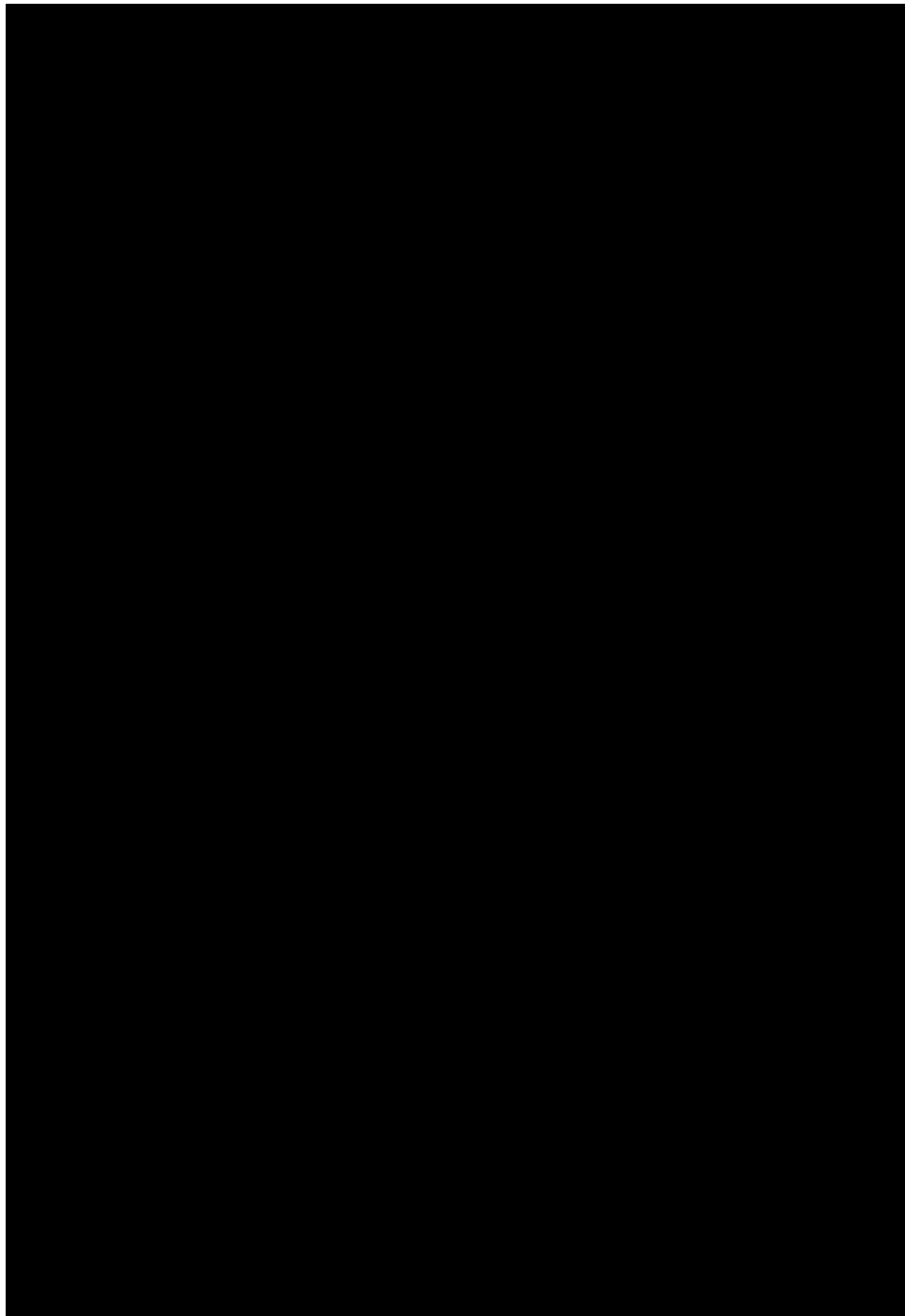


Figure 1.31. Waistcoat, silk embroidery on ribbed silk, France, 1780-90. T.231A-1917.

© Victoria and Albert Museum.

The cream ribbed silk waistcoat in figure 1.31 would have been considered the height of fashion at the time of its production during the 1780s. The brightly embroidered floral design in coloured silks would have been displayed as the focal point of the suit, which would probably have been made out of a plainer material. The floral design runs around the bottom edge of the garment, up the centre and around the collar. It is

embroidered in shades of green and yellow silk in satin stitch, complemented by a border of single-line green stem stitch. This border has a lively floral design, with large lily-like flowers which are embroidered in various shades of pink, blue, purple and yellow overlapping satin stitch. Each flower is connected by a spray of shaded green leaves in satin and stem stitch with a red centre, also worked in satin stitch. The front of the waistcoat is embroidered with diagonal lines of small blue flowers and dark yellow leaves in satin stitch which pick up the similar motif found in the embroidered border. Whilst it is possible that this waistcoat was commissioned especially for Hamilton, it is also feasible that the waistcoat was purchased in a shop or via a merchant as ready-embroidered panels.⁹² Embroidery was no longer produced solely for local consumers to their individual requirements and measurements, but rather served a highly mobile, elite clientele who were likely wearing French embroidered products at foreign courts, such as Hamilton.

Contemporary correspondence further documents the myriad ways in which international male consumers – and British ones in particular – desired and commissioned embroidery from both Paris and Lyon throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Thomas Robinson, the 2nd Baron Grantham, was one such consumer. A diplomat like Hamilton, Grantham was the British ambassador to the Spanish court from 1771-79.⁹³ His correspondence during this time evidences a particular penchant of the British for French embroidery. Grantham's letters on this subject are important because they give an insight into male consumption during the eighteenth century and demonstrate that men actively participated in the world of fashion. Most importantly, the letters corroborate the fact that embroidery, and in particular French embroidered waistcoats and suits, was a highly fashionable consumer product during the 1770s.

Grantham belonged to an elite social group which consumed the fashionable 'new' luxuries of the eighteenth century and who were also avid consumers of embroidery. This is evidenced in a letter sent to Grantham from Robert Waddilove, his chaplain, who wrote: 'I am afraid to trust myself [...] in Wedgewood's [sic] shop, where

⁹² For an in-depth examination of 'ready-made' embroidered clothing, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁹³ Grantham (1738-86) was born in Vienna in 1738 and was an English politician. He became a peer upon his father's death (Thomas Robinson 1st Baron Grantham, British Ambassador to Austria) in 1770 before serving as British Ambassador to Spain from 1771-79, President of the Board of Trade from 1779-82, and Foreign Secretary from 1782-83. Grantham's consumption of French embroidery is examined in detail in Chapter 2.

every thing is so well dispersed to tempt those who have, & those who have not, money to expend.⁹⁴ As Hannah Greig has demonstrated in her work on upper-class society in eighteenth-century London, there was an emerging social group which was united by new notions of fashion - the *beau monde*. This group built a fashionable shared identity through the possession of certain material goods.⁹⁵ The reference here to Wedgwood, whose products became highly desirable consumer objects – or ‘new’ luxuries, firmly places Grantham and his circle in the realms of the fashionable *beau monde*. Furthermore, letters from Fritz, Grantham’s brother, reference fashionable social events such as dinner with Sir Joshua Reynolds, trips to Ranelagh gardens and the opera, all highly-appropriate settings where members of the *beau monde* would conceivably display their latest acquired French embroidery.

Peter McNeil’s recent study has noted the tendency of gentlemen of the late eighteenth century to wear French fashions. He describes their manner of dressing as ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘fashion-centric’, ‘exclusive’ and ‘undemocratic’. Most importantly, his work has shown how macaroni men generally wore the *habit à la française* and that this suit ‘became the transnational and up-to-date fashion for many European men at this time’.⁹⁶ Although Grantham would not necessarily have been perceived as a macaroni as such, he was indeed one of the many ‘European men’ who avidly consumed the French fashions of the period. We can see in Grantham’s correspondence that French embroidery was an important way in which wealthy British consumers sought to display their good taste and adherence to the latest fashions. In a letter to his brother Fritz in 1785, Grantham writes that whilst in Paris he commissioned a suit ‘imitating *à la distance* your Embroidery, I say at a distance as the row of spangles is silver & I believe the suit will be very handsome.’⁹⁷ Fritz was typical of the British gentleman consumer during this period, who consciously imitated their peers’ dress. As a result, embroidery from Paris was in high demand in order to keep up appearances within their social group. Men’s clothing was particularly well-suited to international consumption, since the cut of masculine garments varied little across the continent. Furthermore, French fashions were

⁹⁴ BAR L 30/14/408/28 24: ‘Waddilove, London to Grantham, Madrid’, February 1776.

⁹⁵ Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 47.

⁹⁶ McNeil, *Pretty Gentlemen*, p. 14.

⁹⁷ BAR L 30/15/54/241: ‘Grantham, Whitehall to Fritz’, 8 January 1785.

considered to be at the height of good taste during this period. French embroidered waistcoats thus travelled well across international borders.⁹⁸

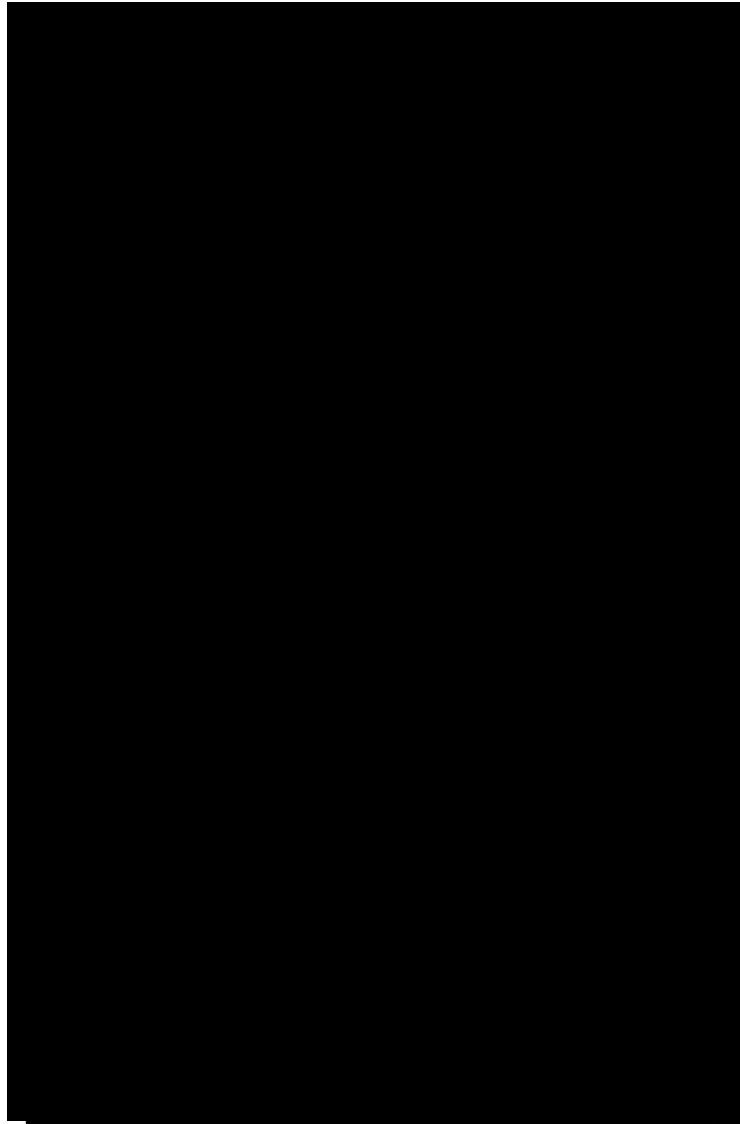


Figure 1.32a. Pair of waistcoat shapes (Piece 2), silk embroidery on ribbed silk, France, 1750-59. T.12-1981. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁹⁸ Ribeiro suggests that in contrast, female dress was less international, more complex and with considerable regional variations. This was due to fewer opportunities for women to travel, as well as the constraints of their 'sexual and social roles'. See Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, p. 33.

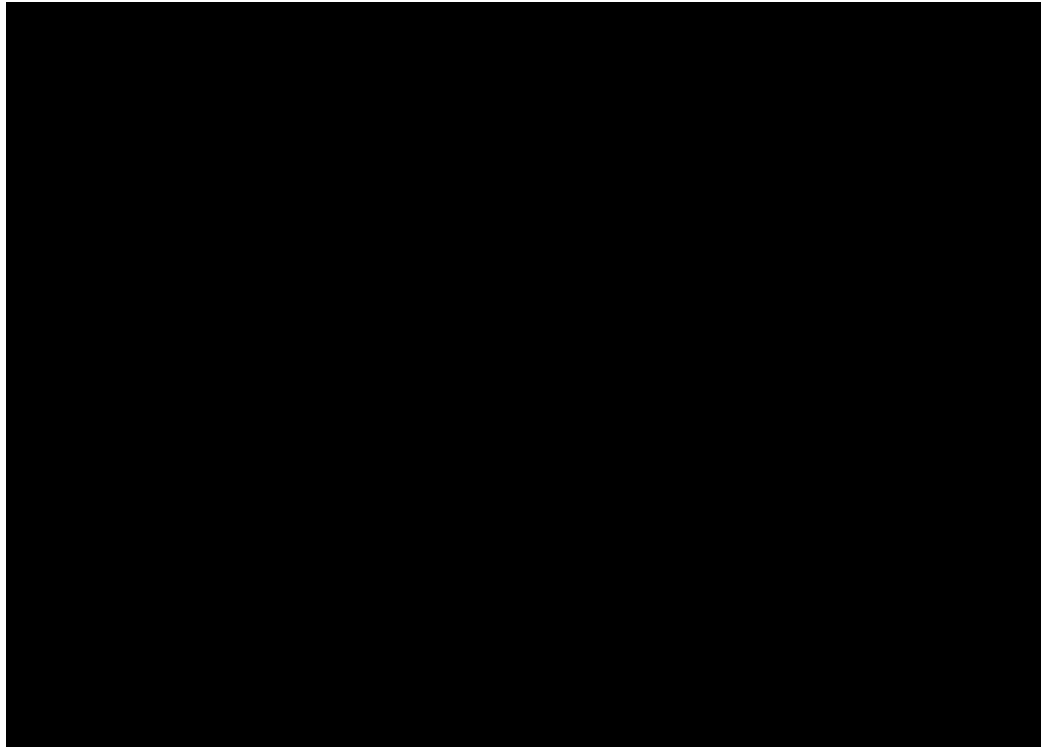


Figure 1.32b. Detail of pair of waistcoat shapes (Piece 2), silk embroidery on ribbed silk, France, 1750-59. T.12-1981. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Certain objects are in themselves further evidence of the international trajectory of fashionable French embroidered products, particularly during the later years of the eighteenth century. The object in figures 1.32a and 1.32b is an embroidered waistcoat shape on a panel of ivory ribbed silk, the rose and leaf design embroidered in chain stitch, a technique achieved through tambouring. The delicate floral motif has been executed in subtle shades of pink, green and brown silk thread, and runs the length of the waistcoat, as well as the pocket flap. There is a stamp in the lower right hand corner which reads 'Custom House/SEIZED DOVER/GR II' (figure 1.32a), indicating that this was a contraband item, seized by custom officials at Dover during an attempt to smuggle it into England. The customs mark, along with the design and technique of the embroidery dates the object to the late 1750s. Its form gives an idea of how such items would have been produced and sold. Customers purchased the shapes, then took them to be made up by a tailor according to their individual measurements. Embroidering the waistcoat to shape on a flat panel of silk ensured that the product could be easily transported. It did not take up as much room as the final product and was less likely to be damaged in transit. Furthermore, the seizure of this item at the border suggests that there was a demand for French embroidery, and the demand was such that individuals were willing to risk

importing the prohibited products.⁹⁹ Evading foreign customs authorities could be made simpler by distributing the product as inconspicuously as possible. Here, the panel could be rolled up and hidden amongst belongings, or camouflaged amongst other lengths of legally-imported textiles.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the types of secular embroidered silk clothing which was consumed by the nobility during the eighteenth century. It reveals the co-existence of two different ‘strands’ of embroidered clothing – that of court attire and that of more informal fashionable clothing – indicating that the embroidery trade of eighteenth century France served a complicated clientele with competing sets of demands. Centuries of tradition and etiquette had a profound impact on the consumer demand for embroidery. A parallel demand for fashion and novelty, influenced by the proliferation of ‘new’ luxuries in the second half of the eighteenth century, had a recognisable effect on the products that the professional embroiderers created in the second half of the century. The nature of this consumer demand thus complicates the story of luxury consumption, in particular scholars’ view of a dichotomy of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury. Nobles were required, out of duty of rank, to adhere to the sartorial etiquette of the court, which demanded that men and women adopt the traditional court dress when attending formal events such as their presentation to the king and other formal occasions. This clothing was expected to be made out of costly materials such as brocaded silk and expensive velvets, the surface of which was elaborately embroidered in gold, silver and silk. Court clothing changed little over the course of the century and was not considered to be the most ‘fashionable’, although periodicals such as the *Mercure* equated expense with fashion. Indeed, fashion influenced the decoration of these garments to a certain extent, but the fashion for lighter and more subtle designs was at odds with the ostentation required of court etiquette. At the same time, elite individuals desired to keep up with the latest fashions and in some

⁹⁹ For a discussion of these particular waistcoat shapes as a smuggled product, see the article by Susan North: Susan North, ‘The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction: A Pair of 1750s Waistcoat Shapes,’ *Textile History*, 39/1 (2008), 92-104. The work of William Farrell is also important for understanding smuggling luxury textiles into Britain within the broader context of consumption. See for example William Farrell, ‘Smuggling Silks into Eighteenth-Century Britain: Geography, Perpetrators, and Consumers’, *Journal of British Studies*, 55 (2016), 268-94.

cases chose to do so through embroidery. An embellishment which was aligned with the 'old' luxury and excessive expenditure of the court was also part of the 'new' luxury. The following chapters will examine the implications that this dual consumption had on the design, retailing and production of embroidery. They will consider how the embroidery trade evolved to meet the demands of its varied clients, who at once consumed products out of a 'duty of rank' on the one hand, and indulged their individual desire for fashion on the other.

CHAPTER 2

Negotiating Taste: Consumers, Designers and Merchants

Introduction

This chapter analyses the formation and communication of taste in fashionable embroidery by examining the relationship between consumers, designers and merchants, challenging current ideas about taste and the making of taste. The previous chapter demonstrated that etiquette was extremely important in the wearing of embroidery throughout the eighteenth century. This chapter will examine how such principles were communicated as matters of taste in embroidery design. It argues that over the course of the eighteenth century, a standard of taste in embroidery design was forged through the interactions between these groups of consumers, designers and merchants, and shaped by the contextual debate of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury. It explores the ways in which embroidery, traditionally associated with courtly displays of power and expenditure, was able to transcend the boundaries of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury. Such dichotomies, I argue, become more complicated if embroidery, part of the ‘old’ luxury, continued to be purchased by consumers who were at the same time consuming the ‘new’ luxuries. The embroidery trade adapted to these changes in consumer behaviour in the second half of the eighteenth century by creating designs which adhered to the principles of taste as communicated through letters, the periodical press, and the designs themselves.

In *L’Art du brodeur*, Saint-Aubin privileged the role of the designer in the production of a successful work of embroidery, declaring that ‘Design is the spirit of Embroidery’.¹ It is unsurprising that Saint-Aubin attributed such an elevated status to the designer, since he himself was designer to the king. However, Saint-Aubin neglects to account for the contributions of many other actors to the process of embroidery, including merchants and consumers. This chapter seeks to evaluate critically Saint-Aubin’s assertion by unpicking the relationship between multiple groups of individuals and their contribution to the design and production process of fashionable embroidery

¹ ‘le Dessin est l’ame de la Broderie’. Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), p. 17. Hereafter *L’Art du brodeur*.

in eighteenth-century France. It will demonstrate that the formation of taste in fashionable embroidery design was not solely the result of court etiquette, but of commercial exchanges with consumers and merchants. Both of these groups had an influential role in shaping notions of taste in embroidery styles.

Finally, this chapter seeks to challenge the prevailing assumption that Paris was the primary arbiter of taste during this period. Until recently, historical scholarship has tended to elevate the role of capital cities in setting fashions and taste. In the context of Europe there is a tendency to focus on the primacy of Paris as a major disseminator of fashion across the continent. The case of the embroidery trade in eighteenth-century France, however, challenges this story and an analysis of the relationship between consumers, designers and merchants further demonstrates that Lyon emerged as a leader of taste in fashionable embroidery design. The commercial correspondence exchanged between Parisian and Lyonnais merchants reveals that there was a dialogue between the two cities in forming a standard of taste in embroidery.

2.1 Taste and Tastemakers in the Eighteenth Century

Taste is an important concept for interrogating the consumption and production of embroidery. However, discerning what exactly constituted taste is not a straightforward task. As John Styles and Amanda Vickery note, ‘taste was a slippery, indeterminate concept. Then, as now, it embraced a number of overlapping meanings’.² For example, fashion and taste were terms which were often used interchangeably. The term ‘fashion’ during the eighteenth century denoted not only changes in the cut, style or decoration of clothing, but was also used to refer to a system of manners, behaviours and social standing. In French, this distinction was indicated by the plural *les modes* (fashionable clothing) and *la mode* (fashion in general).³ For men and women in the eighteenth century, *la mode* was an abstract concept which signified change and novelty, and stood in contrast

² John Styles and Amanda Vickery, ‘Introduction’, in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, ed. by John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 1-34 (p. 14).

³ Kathryn Norberg, ‘Louis XIV: King of Fashion?’, in *Fashion Prints in the Age of Louis XIV: Interpreting the Art of Elegance*, ed. by Kathryn Norberg and Sandra Rosenbaum (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014), pp. 135-65 (p. 135 and p. 162).

to tradition.⁴ At times it was a concept which created confusion and attracted criticism. Indeed, to be fashionable was no straightforward task. It was not enough to simply purchase and wear the latest fashions. An awareness and knowledge of the right things to wear, and when, where and how to wear them, was essential to the business of being fashionable.⁵ Fashion was thus closely linked to ideas of social identity and belonging. Whilst fashion was in a constant change of flux and linked to ideas of luxury, taste on the other hand, was an intangible quality which could be considered a personal attribute or quality. Nevertheless, the term ‘taste’ was still applied to goods which were considered ‘fashionable’. As Chapter 3 will show, the fashion press of the 1780s included information on the latest fashions, which included embroidery. However, fashionable embroidery was also referred to as ‘tasteful’, of ‘good taste’, or in the ‘latest taste’ in contemporary correspondence, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Understanding who possessed ‘good taste’ or who the tastemakers were in the eighteenth century is similarly challenging. Historians and sociologists of our own time have suggested that taste was a social construct; notions of taste were linked to one’s class identity. Pierre Bourdieu for example, proposed that there was a standard of taste and that this was the taste of the ruling classes. Writing his theory on the basis of field work from his own time, he suggested that aesthetic taste served to strengthen class distinctions, with ‘cultural capital’ being at the centre of the differentiation between social classes. Those with the highest level of cultural capital, usually those in the upper echelons of society, had a different aesthetic preference to other social classes and taste was the most visible through an individual’s consumption of certain goods such as clothing and furniture.⁶ For Bourdieu, there is a ‘social hierarchy of consumers’.⁷

If taste was socially constructed, could taste be taught and learned? In considering how Bourdieu’s theory applies to the eighteenth century, it could be said that the education of the elite classes in the eighteenth century encouraged men and women to cultivate certain manners and aesthetic preferences through taste-forming exercises such

⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵ Lesley E. Miller, ‘Male Adornment’, in *The Arts of Living: Europe 1600-1815*, ed. by Elizabeth Miller and Hilary Young (London: V&A Publishing, 2016), pp. 184-88.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

as the Grand Tour for men and social visiting for women.⁸ Such activities enabled these participants to learn, practice and perfect the behaviour and aesthetic judgement appropriate to their social standing. Writing specifically on the eighteenth century, Colin Campbell attributes the consumer's desire to be seen as an individual of 'good taste' to 'an effort to protect one's "good name"'. The ideal of character during the eighteenth century was associated with 'taste', which itself was associated with virtue and sensibility. Thus, to be unfashionable was seen as an outward symbol of a 'dubious moral standing.'⁹

The emerging public sphere, centred around the *salons*, encouraged discussion and debate around ideas of taste, style and luxury. The increasing popularity of public spaces such as coffee houses, salons and theatres encouraged a public engagement with the notions of 'good taste', polite sociability and the consumption of fashionable goods.¹⁰ John Brewer for example, has commented on the growing importance of urban life in cultivating and refining 'good taste', particularly in England: 'Taste in the arts was considered a sign of refinement, cultivation and politeness, qualities it was believed were best nurtured in towns and cities.'¹¹ The growing importance of urban life went hand-in-hand with the commercialisation of the arts and a diminution to some extent in the influence of the royal court over the arts and culture.

These theoretical approaches to taste across different chronologies and geographies map onto the views expressed by contemporary commentators, who debated

⁸ Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart, 'Display, Acquisition and Boundaries of Luxury and Taste', in *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe: Display, Acquisition and Boundaries*, ed. by Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 1-17 (p. 4).

⁹ Colin Campbell, 'Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England: A Character-Action Approach', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 40-57 (p. 49).

¹⁰ On coffee houses in England, see for example Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005). For a discussion of politeness and its relation to consumer culture in England, see Helen Berry, 'Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), 375-94.

¹¹ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. xviii.

whether taste could be taught or learned.¹² In Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1702) for example, the entry for taste (*goût*) described it as a natural instinct.¹³ In 1757, an article on taste appeared in the *Encyclopédie* with contributions from Voltaire, Montesquieu and D'Alembert. Voltaire wrote that taste was inherently personal. It was not only based on a simple appreciation of aesthetic beauty, but rather provoked a sensation within the individual. Taste was a feeling and came from a reasoned appreciation of the connected qualities found within the object or work of art which was being contemplated, although it could be perfected over time with practice. For Montesquieu, judgements of taste came from within and appreciation of beauty was derived from natural curiosity and surprise. For all three philosophers, however, a standard of 'good taste' was perfected only by civilised and polite societies.¹⁴ Later in the century, an individualistic view of taste was favoured by Kant, who argued in 1790 that aesthetic judgement was subjective and could not be learned, nor was there a standard of taste which existed.¹⁵ Taste came from within.

The principal consumers of luxury and the arbiters of fashion and taste in Europe during the early modern period were for a long time, the royal courts. Until the early decades of the eighteenth century, the French court, which was predominantly based at Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV, set the fashions in manners, furniture, and clothing which were emulated throughout Europe by other princely courts. Members of courtly society engaged in conspicuous consumption by bedecking themselves and their households with rich and ornate jewellery, clothing and furnishings. Within this context,

¹² For an overview of taste in France, see for example Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: Taste, Politics and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007).

¹³ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes, & les termes des sciences et des arts. 2e édition revue, corrigée et augmentée par M. Basnage de Beauval*, 2 vols (Rotterdam: Arnoud et Reinier Leers, 1702), I, p. 1024.

¹⁴ François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, 'Goût' (1757) in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers etc.*, ed. by Denis Diderot et Jean le Rond D'Alembert (Paris: Briasson, 1751-72), pp. 761-70 in *ARTFL Encyclopédie Project*, ed. by Robert Morrissey and Glenn Roe (University of Chicago: Autumn 2017 Edition) <<http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>> [last accessed 19 April 2019].

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

a standard of taste emerged in which expensive and luxurious objects served to reinforce the absolute power of the French monarch.¹⁶

The continuing primacy of the court, particularly in the upper end of the market for expensive woven silks from Lyon, was an important factor in matters of taste and style in eighteenth-century France and complicates the story of taste somewhat. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the periodicals of the early eighteenth century such as the *Mercure* equated expense with style. It reinforced the fact that it was the court that set the fashions. In this respect, taste did not come from 'within', but stemmed from one's social rank, as Bourdieu suggested. Indeed, the latest and most expensive silk designs were first and foremost consumed by the court. Adaptations and older, less expensive designs, subsequently filtered down to a broader range of consumers who sought fashionable goods within a lower price range.¹⁷ By the time these products had filtered down, they were no longer considered in the latest taste and had already been replaced by novel products which were avidly consumed by the court. This was similar for a range of luxury goods in eighteenth-century Paris.

The consumers of fashionable embroidery produced in eighteenth-century France were both wealthy and of a high social standing. Whilst in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries those who bought professionally-embroidered products were predominantly members of the royal court, towards the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, the consumer base of the professional embroiderers had expanded to include the aristocracy and wealthy members of the middle classes. Within the nobility, it was those who regularly attended court and who were close to the king, who possessed the most expensive clothes around the end of the reign of Louis XIV. For Daniel Roche, 'it is a small number of very large fortunes which suggest, even magnify, the role of display

¹⁶ On French absolutism in general, see for example Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). See also Jennifer M. Jones, *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).

¹⁷ See: Miller, 'Paris-Lyon-Paris: Dialogue in the Design and Distribution of Patterned Silks in the 18th Century', in *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce*, ed. by Robert Fox and Anthony Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 139-167; Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands-Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum in association with the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996), p. 97.

and luxury and the increase in the ostentatious expenditure of court circles.¹⁸ By 1789, 'the growth in the value of noble wardrobes, nominally 233 per cent, in real terms 163 per cent, reveals a new situation: a ceiling of consumption, sometimes of prodigality, had been reached, which it was difficult to exceed.'¹⁹ The top-end of the market for expensive embroidered clothing thus continued and was sustained by the consumer behaviour of the nobility well into the eighteenth century.²⁰

The changes in the structure of society during this period resulted in a certain amount of disruption to the old order as traditional hierarchies were challenged. Imitation of one's social superiors through fashionable dress was rife and contemporaries were deeply concerned with the increasing difficulty with which to distinguish the different social classes.²¹ Anxieties to obtain approbation from one's peers in order to advance or maintain one's social position were also prevalent throughout this period. Whilst the possession of wealth certainly helped in this regard, it was external displays of one's cultural refinement and taste which cemented one's belonging to a certain social class. It could be said that amongst the anxieties about people being able to subvert the visual signs of social class, individuals looked for ways to differentiate and distinguish themselves through cultural codes and visual markers of taste. Nevertheless, there remained a barrier to 'good taste' in actively participating in the world of fashion. It was not enough to be able to simply purchase an embroidered waistcoat, for example. One had to know what was the right waistcoat to wear, how to wear it and when. Such codes could only be learned and perfected through interactions and conversations with those with the 'right' knowledge of what constituted 'good taste'. Those in the know included

¹⁸ Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime*, trans. Jean Birrell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 96.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 112.

²⁰ The market for expensive embroidered clothing required by court etiquette is examined in Chapter 3.

²¹ Louis Sébastien Mercier's *Le Tableau de Paris* is one account of a changing society in which visual signs of hierarchy (i.e. dress) were becoming more difficult to ascertain. See Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Le Tableau de Paris* (Neuchâtel: 1781).

fellow consumers, merchants and designers and worked together to create a shared understanding of taste.²²

By adhering to the latest fashions and displaying a socially-approved form of tasteful embroidery, the consumer could thus be seen to be indulging their desire to be viewed by society as a character of good ‘moral standing’, as Campbell argued. Popular embroidery motifs during the eighteenth century followed patterns of accepted notions of ‘good taste’ or displaying the right stance on the world and it is possible to track a change in the design aesthetic of professionally-produced embroidery for clothing. Over the course of half a century, embroidery had moved from the splendour associated with the court of Louis XIV and political absolutism, towards the more delicate floral designs now associated by art historians with the ‘rococo’ and ‘neoclassicism’, and the new enlightened political discourse of feeling and sentimentality. Materials became lighter, with silk and spangles favoured over heavy gold and silver metal thread. Motifs became smaller and more varied: waistcoats, muffs and dresses were adorned with embroidered flowers, trees, animals, pastoral scenes and architectural designs. Such designs evoked a growing interest in nature and botany, and a preoccupation with notions of sensibility and politeness.

But embroidery complicates the story of taste in the eighteenth century. In its most traditional form, it would have been considered an ‘old’ luxury and associated with the absolutist politics and ostentatious display of the *ancien régime*, values which were at odds with the emerging polite and moral discourse of ‘new’ luxury. At a time when printed calicoes were gaining popularity in Europe as a ‘new’ luxury because they reflected the taste for lighter fabrics, comfort and domesticity, as well as the taste for the exotic, it was necessary that the embroiderers and embroidery designers of eighteenth-century France could adapt their products not only to the changing tastes of their clientele, but to the changing nature of the clientele itself. As we have seen, the main consumers of embroidery during this period were the nobility, but the nobility itself was an extremely varied group and as the socio-economic situations of these men and women evolved over the course of the century, so too did their tastes.²³ This is partly reflected in the

²² See Evelyn Welch, ‘Introduction’, in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles and Innovation in Europe 1500-1800*, ed. by Evelyn Welch (London: Oxford University Press/Pasold Research Fund, 2017), pp. 1-30.

²³ For works on the French nobility, see for example Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: from Feudalism to Enlightenment*, trans. William Doyle (Cambridge:

embroidery designs for clothing in the second half of the eighteenth century, which will be explored in more detail in this chapter. Yet embroidery does not fit comfortably with the dichotomies of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxury. Whilst styles and materials evolved to suit the tastes of its clientele, it did not undergo a process of technological innovation, a feature most often associated with ‘new’ luxuries. Nor did it undergo a dramatic reduction in price, so much so that it became a commodity available to all sections of society.

Furthermore, the links between Paris and Lyon in the dissemination of style and taste have long been acknowledged in scholarly studies, particularly within the context of eighteenth-century silk manufacture. Lesley E. Miller for example, asserts that ‘Paris had a special place in the affections of the Lyonnais, as it was an indispensable link in the chain of production, distribution, and consumption of brocaded silk. These silks were mainly promoted through their constantly changing (and innovative) designs and Paris was the source of new ideas and taste, as well as the main depot and market for Lyonnais silks.’²⁴ Further still, that ‘Lyon was not an island. Indeed, it sat at the crossroads of an exchange of goods and ideas with many other cities in and beyond France.’²⁵ During the eighteenth century then, there was indeed a symbiotic relationship between the two cities. Lyon attracted merchants and consumers from across France and further afield in Europe who were drawn to its international fairs and reputation for silk manufacture; it was aligned with skilled production. By contrast, Paris was seen as the centre of ideas and taste, where designers and merchants from Lyon would travel to draw inspiration for their products.

2.2 Communicating Taste

2.2.1 Consumers

If taste relied on a shared set of values as Bourdieu has argued, it was most effective when outwardly displayed. Fashionable embroidery, which was expensive and in the majority

Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Jay M. Smith, ed., *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: Reassessments and New Approaches* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

²⁴ Miller, ‘Jean Revel: Silk Designer, Fine Artist or Entrepreneur?’, *Journal of Design History*, 8/2 (1996), 79-96 (p. 91).

²⁵ Miller, *Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century French Silk Designers* (Pasold Research Fund, 2015), p. v.

of cases, could only be purchased by the elite classes, was the ideal way in which to visually signify one's adherence to a standard of 'good taste'. The preoccupation with displaying one's 'good taste' through embroidery is evidenced through contemporary correspondence exchanged between the European elites during this period. Moreover, it will become apparent that the concept of 'good taste' in embroidery design was not confined to the national level, but instead was part of a broader international standard of taste which transcended geographical borders, indicated by the personal correspondence of British gentlemen. As we have seen in the previous chapter, professionally-produced French embroidery was highly desired by a group of elite consumers not just within France, but who were situated across Europe. Social networks between friends, colleagues and acquaintances – or 'the consumers' – enabled a flow of fashionable French embroidery across the continent. French embroidery would be obtained through purchases during diplomatic missions, and commissions placed through travelling family members, friends and colleagues. Shopping for French embroidery by proxy was common during this period and the correspondence of elite consumers such as Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond (1701-50) and Thomas Robinson, the 2nd Baron Grantham (1738-86), evidence that ideas of 'taste' were essential to the process of buying embroidery.²⁶

Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond was an English nobleman, politician and the grandson of Charles II, but he was also closely linked to the French court, simultaneously holding the title of the duc d'Aubigny; his father, Charles Lennox, 1st Duke of Richmond was jointly ennobled to the peerage of France with his mother in 1684. In 1724, a year after the death of Lennox's father and his succession to the title of 2nd Duke of Richmond at the age of 23, Monsieur de la Tour, Lennox's agent in France, wrote to the Duke to update him on an embroidered suit he had had commissioned in Paris. He enclosed the embroidery design (now lost) with his letter and wrote that he considered the design to be 'of a good taste, as is usual for a complete suit it will cost 1500 *livres* in gold and 1200 *livres* in silver.'²⁷ De la Tour further assured the Duke that he had personally met the embroiderer and that he is 'a very honest man, he works for the

²⁶ The practical ways in which French embroidery was sold and bought is examined in detail in Chapter 3.

²⁷ 'd'un bon gout, tel qu'il est pour un habit complet il coutera en or 1500 livres et en argent 1200 livres.' WSR Goodwood Mss 104/347-383: 'Letters', Duke of Richmond 1724-52, p. 349.

King of Portugal and the Duke of Lorraine and all the court'.²⁸ This letter demonstrates that whilst the Duke desired embroidery from France, he relied upon de la Tour, his local agent in France, to relay information about fashionable embroidery design. De la Tour was entrusted to make judgements of 'good taste' which were not only evaluated in terms of the visual aesthetic, but also in terms of price and the calibre of the embroiderer's other customers. 'Good taste' in this context was inherently linked to notions of etiquette, which De la Tour was well placed to understand and communicate to the Duke. In August 1733, de la Tour wrote to the Duke, again on the subject of an embroidery commission with which he had been charged in Paris. The embroidered suit had been requested by the Duke to wear to a wedding in Paris on 15 September 1733. This time, however, de la Tour took it upon himself to offer direct advice regarding the suit and the embroidery which seems to go against what the Duke originally requested:

After having thoroughly reflected on the second suit which you have asked of me in your last letter, I am determined to have you made a three-piece suit embroidered in silver. It will be of a different colour and a little lighter than your suit of *gros de Tours*, the waistcoat and the trimming will be of a silk material which we call *gros de Naples* of a cerise colour which will be embroidered on the same side. There will not be any coloured flowers because they do not go with wool.²⁹

De la Tour's reasoning for his proposed idea was threefold. Firstly, that the proposed suit in silver embroidery would differentiate this suit from the Duke's suit of *gros de Tours*; the Duke had originally requested a woollen suit to be embroidered in gold in the same design as the suit of *gros de Tours* which he would put with the waistcoat from this suit. However, de la Tour reasoned further:

you can very well wear your suit of *gros de Tours* the day of the wedding because it can sometimes still be quite warm around the 15 September, and the next day you can put your second suit, which will be different, and which it seems to me will

²⁸ 'tres honnête homme, il travaille pour le Roy de Portugal et pour le Duc de Lorraine et toute la cour'. Ibid.

²⁹ 'Après avoir bien réfléchi sur le second habit que vous me demandez par votre dernière lettre, je me suis déterminé à vous en faire faire un Complet brodé en argent il sera d'une couleur différente et un peu plus claire que votre habit de gros de Tours, la veste et les paremens seront d'une étoffe de soye que nous appellons gros de Naples de couleur de serize qui seront brodés en plain il n'y aura point de fleurs nuées parce que on n'en met point avec du drap.' Ibid., p. 363.

make you much more honourable. And finally, is that this second three-piece suit will only cost you 5 *louis d'or* more than the simple suit for which you asked [...];³⁰

Further still, taking de la Tour's advice would mean that the Duke would be able to do without having a separate winter suit made 'because these sorts of woollen suits with this *gros de Naples* [waistcoat], which are quite heavy materials, are usually worn here during the winter and without colour being an issue, the fashion being to wear when it is cold, green, and the colour of pink'.³¹ Here we can see that de la Tour gives specific advice to the Duke in order that the Duke would be able to adhere to a shared set of fashionable principles through his embroidered suit when he attended a wedding in Paris the following month. This set of principles was clearly influenced by the sartorial etiquette of the environment in which the outfit was to be worn. De la Tour emphasised the need to have a second suit in order to be 'different', indicating that formal court appearances required the purchase of a new outfit, and that it was in bad taste to wear the same outfit twice. The knowledge and understanding of the principles of taste in Paris which de la Tour shares with the Duke is evidence that 'good taste' in embroidery relied on the sharing of information. An appreciation of what was tasteful in embroidery was therefore not innate and an expression of personal aesthetic judgement, but an adherence to a shared set of principles which were learned through regular interactions with those of the same social class, or with those who possessed this knowledge, such as agents and merchants.

Similar to Lennox but a generation later, Grantham regularly commissioned embroidered waistcoats and suits from France, particularly Paris and Lyon, in the 1770s.

³⁰ 'vous pouvez fort bien porter votre habit de gros de Tours le jour du mariage parce qu'il fait quelques fois encore assez chaud le 15 de Septembre, et le lendemain vous mettriez ce second habit tout different, ce qui vous feroit ce me semble bien plus d'honneur, et enfin c'est que ce second habit complet ne vous coutera que cinq louis d'or de plus que le simple habit que vous demandrez'. Ibid. One *louis d'or* was worth 24 *livres* in 1733. This value was fixed by an edict issued on 15 January 1726. See Jean Sgard, 'L'Échelle des revenus', *Dix-huitième siècle, au tournant des lumières: 1780-1820*, 14 (1982), 425-33 (p. 245).

³¹ 'parce que ces sortes d'habits de drap avec ces gros de Naples qui sont des Etoffes assez fortes se portent icy communement l'hiver et sans que la couleur y fasse aucun obstacle, la mode etant de porter pendant la froid, le vert, et le couleur de Roze même pourveu que les Etoffes soient fortes'. WSR Goodwood Mss 104/347-383, p. 349.

Grantham, who was born in 1738 in Vienna to Thomas Robinson 1st Baron Grantham (British Ambassador to Austria) and Frances Worsley, was an English politician. He served as the British Ambassador to Spain from 1771 until war broke out with the Spanish in 1779, when he took up the post of President of the Board of Trade; from 1782 until 1783 he served as the Foreign Secretary under Lord Shelburne. During his political career and whilst posted abroad in Madrid, Grantham corresponded regularly with family and friends, and letters which were exchanged during Grantham's residency in Madrid, from around 1774 to 1779, show that he and members of his circle were avid consumers of French embroidered products, particularly embroidered waistcoats, from Paris and Lyon.

It is important to interrogate Grantham's consumption of French embroidery for the following reasons. Firstly, although he had no direct link to France as Lennox did as duc d'Aubigny, Grantham still sought French commodities even though French imported textiles such as silks were banned by protectionist policies in England. Slavish imitation of French fashions was widely satirised in England by contemporary writers and engravers, and was denounced as frivolous and morally dubious. 'New' luxuries manufactured in England on the other hand were aligned with the principles of taste and the economic good of the nation. Indeed, Grantham was also part of this new consumerism, as evidenced by the discussions of Wedgwood in his correspondence with his chaplain.³² The products of Wedgwood were synonymous with the consumption of 'new' luxury goods which were innovative, novel and varied. Yet at the same time, French fashions were still extremely popular with elite consumers and French textiles were regularly smuggled into England.³³ Being stationed abroad, Grantham was in an excellent position to indulge his desire for French embroidered clothing which he could obtain without having to smuggle into the English port. Secondly, as British ambassador to Spain, Grantham was stationed at a foreign court. His wearing of French embroidery

³² This particular letter is discussed in Chapter 1. See also BAR L 30/14/408/28: 'Waddilove, London to Grantham, Madrid', 24 February 1776.

³³ The influence of French fashions across Europe is documented in works such as: Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe: 1715-1789* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002); Peter McNeil, *Pretty Gentlemen: Macaroni Men and the Eighteenth-Century Fashion World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018). On smuggling, see: Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); William Farrell, 'Smuggling Silks into Eighteenth-Century Britain: Geography, Perpetrators, and Consumers', *Journal of British Studies*, 55 (2016), 268-94.

signified that there was a pan-European taste for French embroidery. The Bourbon court at Madrid where Grantham was stationed looked to France, particularly Paris and Lyon, for silks and embroidery. Miller has shown that Spain was a major market for the Lyon silk manufacturers and travelling merchants such as François Grogard (1748-1823), who was a partner in Camille, Pernon et Cie, a silk merchant manufacturer, spent considerable time commissioning orders on behalf of the Spanish court for Lyon silks and embroideries.³⁴ Grantham therefore conformed to Spanish court etiquette by wearing French embroidery, here again demonstrating the extent to which notions of taste were embedded within social structures and the etiquette of the court.³⁵

Grantham's correspondence demonstrates that his orders for French embroidery were carried out on his behalf by friends and colleagues travelling via France during this period, rather than directly between himself and an embroiderer. The correspondence between Grantham and Count Masin document regular commissions carried out on Grantham's behalf by Masin in both Paris and Lyon. On 17 January 1779, for example, Masin wrote to Grantham to inform him that he was leaving for Paris via Lyon on the 24 or 25 February and asked if Grantham had any requests for embroidery. A few months later, on 27 April, Masin wrote to confirm the commissions: 'I had no time at all in the noisy whirlwind of Paris to tell you of the successful carrying out of your orders. I am bringing with me your suit of clothes, the silk and the embroidered lace.'³⁶

When placing orders through friends and acquaintances, it was imperative that the person who requested the item could trust their friends' taste and was a common theme in almost every order placed for embroidery through a third party in Grantham's letters. On 4 October 1776, for example, Grantham wrote that he was sending Masin a

³⁴ Miller, 'Material Marketing: How Lyonnais Silk Manufacturers Sold Silks, 1660-1789', in *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century: Comparative Perspectives from Western Europe*, ed. by Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 85-98; Miller, 'Fidélités trompeuses: la consommation d'étoffes de soie françaises à Madrid, 1759-1789', in *Autour des Van Loo: Peinture, commerce des tissus et espionnage en Europe (1250-1830)*, ed. by Christine Rolland (Rouen: Presses Universitaires, 2012), pp. 137-46.

³⁵ Although French fashions were followed by the Spanish court, it was keen to give the impression that Spanish silks were being bought and worn. Miller, 'Material Marketing: How Lyonnais Silk Manufacturers Sold Silks, 1660-1789', p. 93.

³⁶ BAR L 30/14/245/3: 'Letter from Masin, Turin to Grantham', 17 January 1779 and BAR L 30/14/245/4: 'Letter from Masin, Bordeaux to Grantham', 27 April 1779.

parcel of clothes, including waistcoats, for his sons from Lyon because Masin did not trust them with their choice.³⁷ The Prince Lobkowitz wrote to Grantham in 1776 regarding a series of embroidery commissions he had carried out in France:

Mr Robinson who is happy to trust my taste in the choice of the embroidery, will not be able to complain that, not only did I beat my brains to satisfy him but over and above that, persons, who in the opinion of all have impeccable taste, were consulted, and I hope that the suit will not only be the admiration of all Madrid but will also be admired elsewhere.³⁸

And the following year he wrote: 'I rely on Mr Robinson for the approval that the design and the embroidery deserve, and I flatter myself that you will not be displeased with the price either'.³⁹

In 1779, Grantham wrote to his brother, again on the subject of his commissions with Masin: 'Masin is with many commissions. [...] my spring cloaths will arrive in ten days time, all I know [of the Paris one], is that it is embroidered in silks, but what colour a stuff is, I do not yet know'.⁴⁰ The descriptions of Grantham's embroidery commissions are never detailed, explaining simply that they are from Paris or Lyon, and giving a brief reference to the material. It could be argued that this is because the writer did not consider that the recipient would be interested in elaborate descriptions of clothes, especially given that the content of the remainder of the letters is often given over to discussions of political and diplomatic events. However, here we can see that even Grantham himself did not know the exact colour of the embroidery he was to receive, he was only aware that the embroidery was to be in silk.

Nevertheless, Grantham's awareness of silk embroidery is important because it enables us to identify the types of products which were being consumed by individuals of Grantham's standing. Silk embroidery was highly fashionable from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. Although not as expensive as gold and silver embroidery, it was still considered a high-end luxury product and took a considerable amount of skill. The advantage of embroidering in silks was that a high level of depth could be achieved through the layering of different shades of coloured silks and through a combination of

³⁷ BAR L 30/15/54/4: 'Letter from Grantham, St. Ildefonso to Frederick', 4 October 1776.

³⁸ BAR L 30/14/225/4: 'Letter from Lobkowitz, Rome to Grantham', 26 June 1776.

³⁹ BAR L 30/14/225/6: 'Letter from Lobkowitz, Prague to Grantham', 29 March 1777.

⁴⁰ BAR L 30/15/54/142: 'Letter from Grantham, Aranjuez to Fritz [no. 31]', 1779.

different stitches. Viewed in different lights, from natural sunlight to the evening candlelight of an aristocratic interior, the sheen of the silks would have created an exquisite visual effect. The effect was so that the design was brought to life and imitated for example, flowers and foliage. The example in figure 2.1a is representative of the type of product that Grantham and his correspondents probably exchanged. These are waistcoat shapes, unmade up panels which would have been purchased ready-embroidered and then taken to a tailor to be made up according to individual measurements. This type of product would have been the most suitable for distributing over long distances because it was flat and so could easily be packed in a trunk or rolled in a package. These waistcoat shapes are of cream satin, embroidered with various shades of coloured silks, and with a skirted bottom, highly fashionable during this period. Furthermore, Grantham indicates that he is expecting clothes for spring. It is therefore likely that the clothes would have been of a lightweight material and of light colours, depending on the fashion for that particular year.

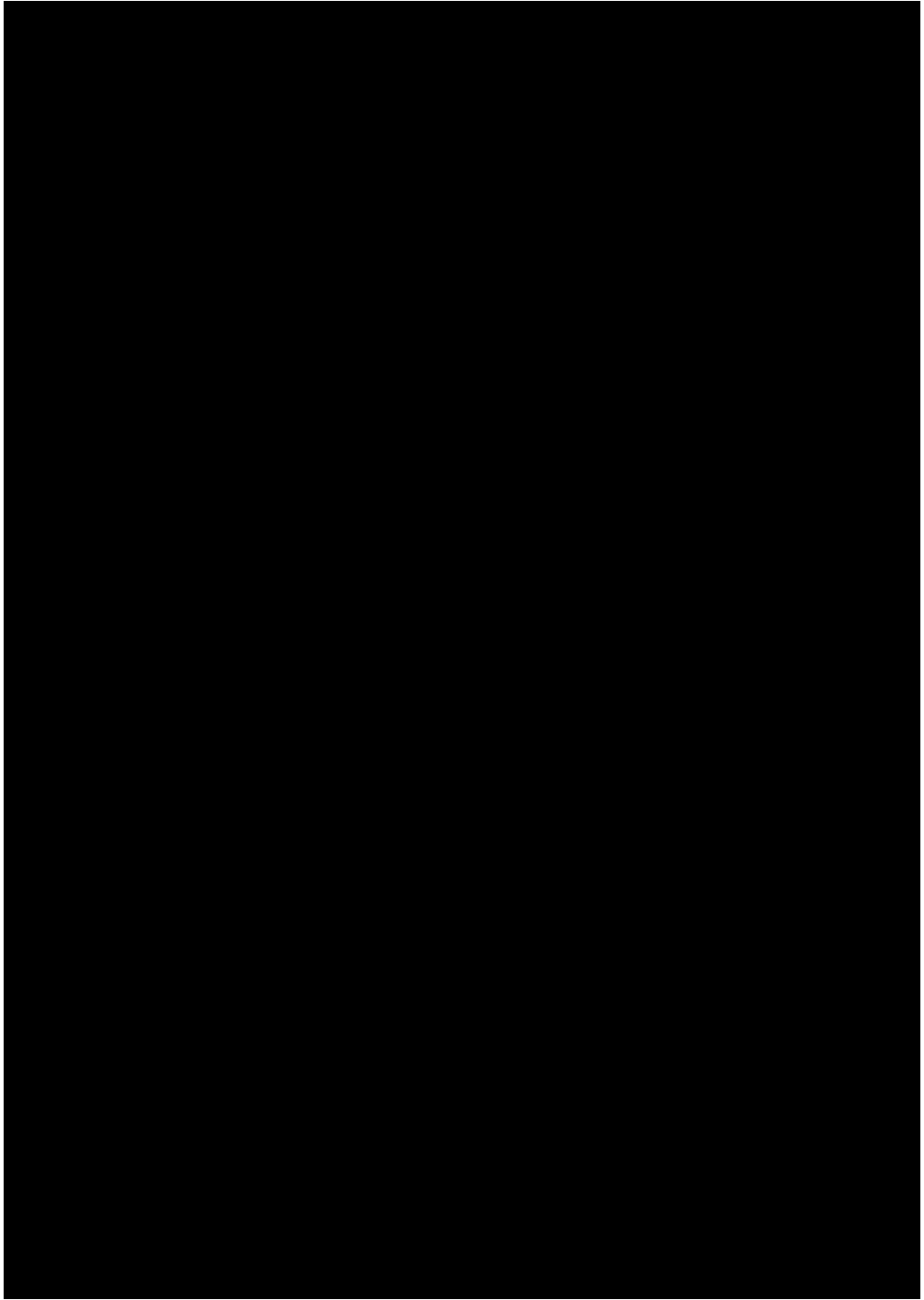


Figure 2.1a. Waistcoat panel, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1770s. T. 26A-1961. ©
Victoria and Albert Museum.

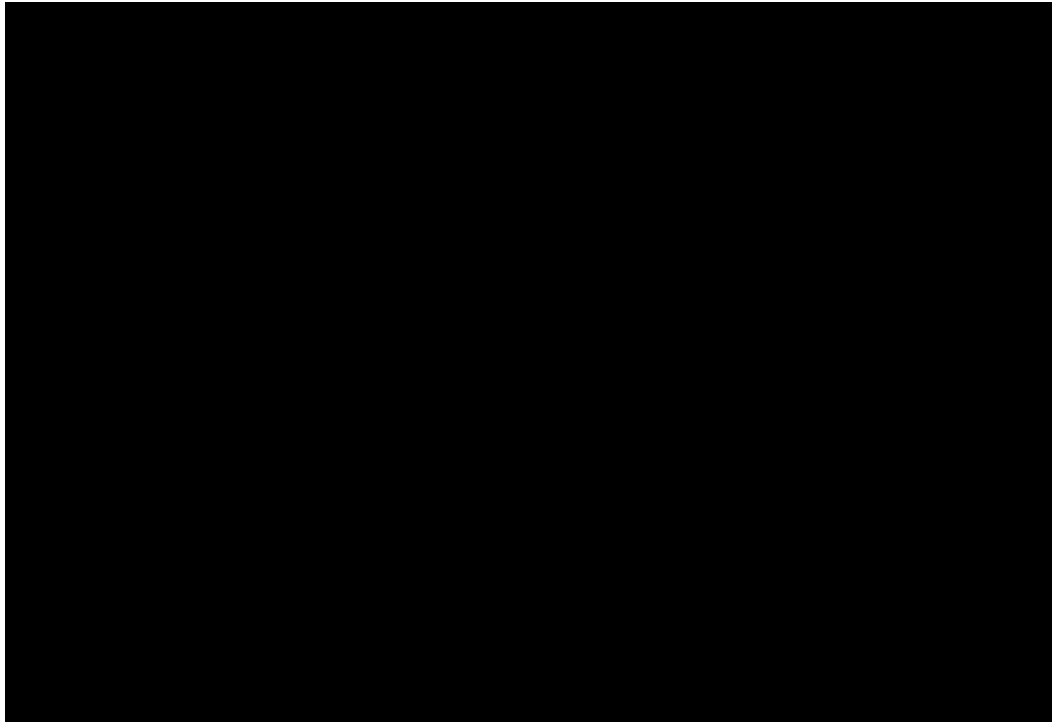


Figure 2.1b. Detail of waistcoat panel, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1770s. T. 26A-1961. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Why, then, was so little detail about the design or colour of the embroidery included in the letters? Perhaps it was enough that the embroidery was from France. The esteemed reputation of French embroidery across Europe for quality and beauty in its execution may have meant that the recipient would have been satisfied with any design, providing it was of the latest fashion. It could also be that fashionable embroidery designs were likely to have changed by the time they had been disseminated from Paris and Lyon to other European cities where Grantham and his acquaintances resided. In 1774 for example, Grantham's brother wrote to their sister: 'I have sent to Paris for a velvet to be embroidered [...] which I think will be very beautiful, it may be old fashioned & tarnished before you see it'.⁴¹ Although this could be because they were not expecting to see each other for some time, this letter nevertheless indicates that fashion was aligned with what was 'new'.

Not one of these letters describes a specific embroidery design in detail. There are no requests, for example, for floral embroidery, a pastoral scene, or animal motifs, all designs which featured heavily in fashionable embroidery during this period. Perhaps

⁴¹ BAR L 30/17/2/88: 'Letter from Fritz, Aranjuez to Nanny', 11 July 1774.

designs were sent with the letters as a visual indication, much like samples were, yet the absence of any written reference to enclosed designs, with the exception of the exchange in 1724 between Lennox and de la Tour, suggests this to be unlikely.⁴² Claire Walsh, in her work on proxy shopping in eighteenth-century Britain, has noted a similar phenomenon across a range of objects, in which those shopping on behalf of others were rarely given explicit instructions on the criteria of taste, design or fashion. Walsh suggests that such exclusions were not because they were ‘unimportant’ but rather because an intangible concept such as taste relied heavily on a ‘shared knowledge of what was appropriate.’⁴³ Social networks of consumers, in which informal relationships resulted in the purchase and exchange of embroidered products, thus constituted not only an important channel of distribution for French embroidery during this period, but a dialogue in which shared notions of taste were formulated.

The correspondence analysed above suggests that in order to be tasteful, one’s embroidery had to be aesthetically pleasing, of a good price, and had to be similar to that worn or owned by members of the same social group. These aspects diversified and developed over time as the political, social and cultural context changed. For example, in the first half of the eighteenth century, embroidery motifs in silk, silver or gold generally consisted of large-scale floral patterns (figure 2.2). The embroidery commissioned for Lennox was ornate, heavy and of silver or gold metal thread; elaborate embroidered motifs in gold and silver would have been considered of ‘good taste’, a taste which was set by the court. Such rich materials commanded a high price. As we have seen, de la Tour suggests that 1,200-1,500 *livres* was the usual price for such embroidery and the account books of Parisian embroiderers to the court corroborate this assertion.⁴⁴ These prices did not put aristocratic customers off, for expensive embroidery would have visually signified their wealth and thus their belonging to the courtly circle. De la Tour argued, for example, that a second embroidered suit would only cost Lennox 5 *louis d’or* than the suit he had originally ordered: this equated to 120 *livres* – around half of the annual income of an unskilled labourer. Finally, de la Tour emphasised the aristocratic

⁴² The use of samples in the retailing of embroidery is examined in Chapter 3.

⁴³ Claire Walsh, ‘Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, pp. 151-77 (p. 171). See also Walsh’s PhD thesis: Walsh, ‘Shopping in Early Modern London, c. 1600-1800’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, European University Institute, 2001).

⁴⁴ Embroidery prices are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

clientele of the embroiderer employed to work on the Duke's suit, suggesting that in sharing the same embroiderer, these individuals also shared the same taste.



Figure 2.2. Detail of waistcoat, silk and chenille embroidery on ribbed silk, Britain or France, 1735-40. T. 271-1923 © Victoria and Albert Museum.

In contrast, Grantham and his peers were commissioning embroidery during a time of emerging Enlightenment principles, where the discourse of politeness and taste was associated with reasoning, virtue and restrained spending on luxury items. As such, the principles of taste in Grantham's correspondence were aligned with reasonable price. The embroidery referenced is of 'silk', suggesting that whilst it was a luxury item, it was likely to have cost less than the gold and silver embroidery commissioned in the early part of the century by consumers such as Lennox.⁴⁵ Whilst the aesthetic principles of what constituted 'good taste' in embroidery fluctuated over the course of the eighteenth

⁴⁵ Embroidery prices are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

century, the way in which taste was formed remained stable. As the correspondence above has demonstrated, shared concepts of taste continued to be shaped and reinforced through interactions with those who possessed the requisite knowledge of fashionable culture, those being fellow consumers from one's social group or merchants and agents in France who understood the principles of 'good taste'.

2.2.2 Merchants

The implicit trust in one's taste in executing embroidery commissions was a common theme in the correspondence exchanged between consumers. The same can be said of merchants who facilitated embroidery commissions between Paris and Lyon. The evidence that has been found suggests that during the late eighteenth century, merchants were tasked with commissioning embroidered products either directly on behalf of a named client, or to sell on via other merchants or shops.⁴⁶ Miller has demonstrated that such middlemen were essential to the successful functioning of the Lyonnais silk industry because 'they knew the taste of their clients and could be trusted to provide them with what they wanted.'⁴⁷ National and international networks of merchants were similarly important to the functioning of the embroidery trade because they provided embroidery designers and producers with information concerning the intangible quality of 'good taste' which their customers demanded.

Merchants during this period sought to commission embroidery which adhered to the principles of taste and novelty demanded by consumers as explored above. The commercial correspondence of Lyonnais embroidery and silk merchants is a particularly rich source for analysing the way in which ideas of taste were communicated between merchants and then harnessed by producers in order to create embroidery designs which adhered to the standard of taste shared by a certain group of elite consumers. In this section the correspondence of embroidery and silk merchants who were active in the commissioning of embroidery in Lyon will be examined to demonstrate the ways in which ideas of taste were deemed of particular importance in embroidery commissions.

⁴⁶ Surviving merchant correspondence on the subject of embroidery has only be found for the second half of the eighteenth century. It is therefore not possible to say with any certainty that merchants did not have a similar role in the first half of the century, simply that evidence for this has not been found.

⁴⁷ Miller, *Selling Silks: A Merchant's Sample Book 1764* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), pp. 39-40.

Moreover, although correspondence is only available for the second half of the eighteenth century, it evidences that Lyon was a major arbiter of taste in the late eighteenth century, challenging the primacy of Paris in this respect. The commercial correspondence between Paris and Lyon silk and embroidery merchants reveals not only the importance of this ‘middle-man’ role in the formation of taste in embroidery design, but also the importance of Lyon as a production centre. Paris was widely regarded across Europe as being the centre of fashion and luxury during this period and its artisans were highly esteemed. The city had its own guild of embroiderers which strictly regulated the way in which embroidery was produced and by whom it was practiced.⁴⁸ Yet at the same time, the commercial correspondence and account books of Lyon embroidery and silk merchants evidence the fact that large numbers of embroidered products were commissioned from Lyon, as well as Paris. Both Paris and Lyon therefore served domestic and export markets. Those who looked to Lyon for their embroidery were not only merchants from Paris, but from across France and further afield in Europe.

The bankruptcy records of Pascal Vial et Cie, an embroidery merchant who operated in Lyon during the years 1736-82, show that by the 1750s Joseph Pascal, the proprietor, supplied both the domestic and export market.⁴⁹ Amongst his commercial correspondence, one counts letters from customers and merchants in Geneva, Milan, Turin, Birmingham, and Madrid, amongst others. The customers who ordered embroidery from Pascal were located across France, including Marseille, Grenoble and Bordeaux, but a large proportion of his business was conducted elsewhere in Europe, such as Geneva. Pascal corresponded regularly with Jacques Bergier a merchant based in Geneva who purchased embroidered waistcoats from Pascal to sell on to other merchants in Switzerland. Like the embroidery requests in Grantham’s letters, Bergier rarely made specific requests pertaining to design, but rather asked for a variety of waistcoats, the embroidery of which should be different for each one. The most important for Bergier, however, was that the waistcoats should be ‘pretty, & in the latest taste’, and that they should be a reasonable price.⁵⁰ In 1781 he wrote to Pascal to advise him that ‘in this town

⁴⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis for an examination of the Paris guild of embroiderers during the eighteenth century.

⁴⁹ ADR 8 B 1089/5. The commercial correspondence in Pascal, Vial et Cie’s bankruptcy files evidence Pascal’s commercial relationship with merchants in Milan, Lisbon, Naples, Turin, Madrid, Geneva and Birmingham.

⁵⁰ ‘du joli, & du dernier gout’. ADR 8 B 1089/4: ‘Bergier to Pascal, Geneva’, 9 May 1781.

nobody wants anything expensive, the waistcoats must not exceed between 15 and 18 [*livres*].⁵¹ Although the descriptions of the requested embroidery designs are vague, we can see specific information begin to emerge in the merchants' correspondence. Since the merchants were focused on a commercial transaction, it is not surprising to see that price is specified in the majority of the letters analysed, rather than being alluded to as merely 'reasonable' or 'just', as was the case in the consumers' letters. Secondly, the fact that Bergier commissioned embroidery from Lyon suggests that Lyon held an international reputation during this period for fashionable embroidery and fashionable goods were not limited to Paris. Indeed, Lyon was much closer to Geneva than Paris and it would have made practical and financial sense for a Geneva-based merchant to place orders in Lyon instead of Paris. Yet this does not account for the fact that Paris-based merchants were also commissioning embroidery from Lyon as well as (or instead of) from locally-based embroiderers in the capital.

The commercial correspondence between Fiard, a merchant manufacturer of silk, and his contacts in Paris evidence a particular desire in the capital for embroidery from Lyon. Monsieur Bal, a merchant from Paris, wrote to Fiard in 1770 asserting that 'I am the only one in St. Germain for Lyon goods and I can assure you that although small, this town promises quite a considerable consumption, [...] the taste, and the excellent fabrication of which you assure me, I count on your exactitude for a prompt dispatch'.⁵² Bal then gave the following commissions: '1 waistcoat of gold stuffs embroidered ... at ... 130 *livres*' and one of the same but at 80 *livres*.⁵³ Bal thus explicitly asserted a need for

⁵¹ 'dans cette ville on ne veut pas du cher, il ne faudroit pas qu'elles passent le prix le 15 à 18'. ADR 8 B 1089/4: 'Bergier to Pascal, Geneva, 11 May 1781'. The price of 15-18 *livres* was indeed at the lower end of the pricing scale for embroidered clothing. See Chapter 3 for an examination of the range of embroidery prices during the eighteenth century.

⁵² 'je suis seul a St. Germain pour les articles de Lyon, et je puis vous donner cette ville qu'oy que petite pour une consommation assez considerable [...] le gout, et la bonne fabrication que vous m'assurez, je compte sur votre exactitude pour une prompte expedition'. ADR 8 B 876/1: 'Bal to Fiard, St Germain', 14 December 1770. 'St Germain' here refers to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which during the eighteenth century was a suburb of Paris and home to many members of the French nobility. See Natacha Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique: Le marché du luxe à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998).

⁵³ '1 veste fond tissu or Brodé ... a 130 #'. ADR 8 B 876/1: 'Bal to Fiard, St Germain', 14 December 1770.

Lyon embroidery, suggesting that embroidery produced in Lyon was held in high esteem across France and Europe. The emphasis on ‘taste’ further evidences the growing importance of Lyon as a leader of fashion.

In 1774, Bertrand-Delpech, another Paris-based merchant, wrote to Fiard requesting to know whether he has anything ‘in the new style’ or ‘anything of good taste and well made’.⁵⁴ In the same letter, they placed an order for ‘2 waistcoats of gold stuffs embroidered in spangles and *paillons* [...] in chenille’.⁵⁵ In the same year, Bezodit, a Parisian merchant with a shop at the Louvre requested ‘waistcoats [...] in a variety of colours [...] with a gold and silver edging embroidered in coloured spangles and *paillons* and a dozen with gold and silver edging without spangles, all in delicate and pretty designs’.⁵⁶ The use of spangles in embroidery was at the height of fashion during the late eighteenth century and the merchant correspondence from Paris in particular demonstrates the popularity of embroidery with spangles in the capital. In his introduction to *L’Art du brodeur*, Saint-Aubin attributes the origin of embroidery with spangles specifically to Lyon:

For the last two years or so, the Silk Manufacturers of Lyon have been enhancing their beautiful shaded silk embroideries with spangles and *paillons*, which they embroider in their Workshops. With great intelligence they marry the masterpieces of the shuttle with those of the needle: they have just begun producing fabrics at six hundred francs the ell for men’s suits, and this excessive price no longer frightens anyone.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ ‘quelque chose de nouveau dans le genre’ or ‘quelque chose de bon gout et de bien fait’. ADR 8 B 876/1: ‘Bertrand-Delpech to Fiard, Paris’, 7 October 1774.

⁵⁵ ‘2 vestes fonds tissu or brodée en paillettes et paillons [...] en chenille’. Ibid.

⁵⁶ ‘vestes [...] assorties de couleurs [...] bordure or et argt. Brodée a paillettes et paillons de couleur et une douzne ditte bordure or et argt sans paillettes le tout de jolies desseins.’ ADR 8 B 876/1: ‘Bezodit to Fiard, Paris’, 21 March 1774.

⁵⁷ ‘Depuis environ deux ans, les Fabriquants d’étoffes de Lyon, enrichissent leurs belles nuances de compartiments de paillettes et paillons, qu’ils font broder dans leurs Fabriques ; ils marient avec beaucoup d’intelligence les chefs d’œuvres de la navette à ceux de l’aiguille : ils viennent de faire des étoffes à six cens francs l’aune pour habits d’homme ; & l’on n’est plus effrayé de ce prix excessif.’ Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 3.

Saint-Aubin thus singled out Lyon for its use of spangles in embroidery, which could go some way to explaining the growing popularity of embroidery from Lyon and demonstrate one way in which Lyon emerged as a leader of taste during this period.

The merchant correspondence examined above demonstrates a similar level of trust to that seen in the consumers' letters. Trust was imperative to the merchant relationship in order to arrive at a mutual agreement about what constituted 'good' or the 'latest' taste in embroidery design. Merchants based in Paris, elsewhere in France, and in cities across Europe entrusted Lyon-based merchants with producing embroidery which constituted the 'good taste' which their customers sought, based only on vague ideas of colour, material and price. Indeed, trust underpinned almost every form of commercial relationship in the early modern period. Historians have suggested that one of the main purposes of merchant networks was to mitigate the risk and uncertainty associated with long-distance trade in the early modern period, with trust being an important element of networks. Xabier Lamikiz suggests that in order to reduce the risk of agents acting in their own best interests, merchants would 'personalise the agency relationship by embedding it in structures of social relations'.⁵⁸ It could also be suggested that trust, and the freedom afforded to merchants such as Pascal and Fiard to make judgements of 'good taste', encouraged producers and designers to be innovative and experiment with new embroidery designs in order to meet consumer demand for embroidery which had to be both reasonably-priced and tasteful.

In recognising the interdependence of Paris and Lyon in the dissemination of Lyonnais silks, Sargentson argues that 'the concept of novelty was shaped within the Parisian market place, rather than in the centre of production in Lyon.'⁵⁹ Yet an examination of the embroidery trade questions this assertion. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, merchants made vague and general requests for embroidery. Rarely was a specific design feature requested. This could perhaps be because as a product which required just a needle and frame, embroidery was more flexible than the manufacture of a patterned silk, which required the setting up of a loom, a complex and time-consuming process, and expensive if the design needed to be changed at the request of the client. In the absence of specific instructions from consumers and merchants then, embroidery

⁵⁸ Xabier Lamikiz, 'Social Capital, Networks and Trust in Early Modern Long Distance Trade: A Critical Appraisal', in *Merchants and Trade Networks in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, 1550–1800*, ed. by Manuel Herrero Sánchez and Klemens Kaps (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 39–61 (p. 42).

⁵⁹ Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*, p. 5.

designers in Lyon were given *carte blanche* to produce designs which they perceived to be in keeping with the taste of their clients who were located both across France and Europe. As a result of the freedom which they were afforded, both by the retailer and the non-guild context in which they operated, it was up to the embroidery designers and embroiderers of Lyon to create a standard of taste which would then be disseminated within the capital.⁶⁰

2.2.3 Designers and Producers

In the luxury trades of eighteenth-century France, design was a process which required the co-operation of many individuals and was not a process which was owned by a single individual designer. In silk design, for example, merchants and customers contributed to the creation of the design, whilst the draughtsman (*metteur-en-carte*) and the design reader (*liseur de dessins*) were responsible for translating the design onto the loom itself ready for weaving.⁶¹ In fact, it was essential that silk designers could speak ‘the languages of commerce and technology, of the shop and of the workshop. [...] Nicolas Joubert de l’Hiberderie’s treatise on silk design showed that understanding of the correct terminology was important, but also that collaboration with other individuals was integral to the whole process’.⁶² Similarly in wallpaper design, the symbiotic client-manufacturer-designer relationship was integral to the success of a design.⁶³ In embroidery too, the process of translating design from paper to material was still a collaborative one, although

⁶⁰ Aspects of the guild and non-guild regulated trade are examined in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

⁶¹ Miller, ‘Jean Revel: Silk Designer, Fine Artist or Entrepreneur?’, p. 81. Audrey Millet examines the role of the silk designers and the links between design and marketing strategies in her doctoral thesis. See Audrey Millet, ‘Les dessinateurs de fabrique en France (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)’ (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Université Paris 8 and Université de Neuchâtel, 2015).

⁶² Miller, ‘Representing Silk Design: Nicolas Joubert de l’Hiberderie and *Le dessinateur pour les étoffes d’or, d’argent et de soie* (Paris, 1765)’, *Journal of Design History*, 17/1 (2004), 29-53 (p. 46).

⁶³ Christine Velut, ‘Between Invention and Production: The Role of Design in the Manufacture of Wallpaper in France and England at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Design History*, 17/1 (2004), 55-69.

the execution of a design did not require understanding of complicated equipment or technology.⁶⁴

Throughout *L'Art du brodeur* Saint-Aubin emphasised the importance of design in determining the merit of a well-executed piece of embroidery, declaring that 'Design is the basis and foundation of Embroidery.'⁶⁵ Embroidery designers undertook training in professional design schools such as the école de dessin in Lyon and the école royale de dessin in Paris, presumably as well as private drawing classes, and exercised a certain degree of autonomy over the design process.⁶⁶ It was designers, for example, who were ultimately responsible for choosing the appropriate blend of colours and materials which would work on paper as well as on textile. For Saint-Aubin, the design 'determines shapes and good placement. It provides harmony, regulates the proportions, and brings additional merit to the work by the economy of the different materials and the opposition or the blending of diverse methods [of embroidery].'⁶⁷ The design and production of embroidery during the eighteenth century were therefore closely linked. Indeed many designers were also embroiderers themselves, and vice-versa. Archival research has borne out this reality, with many individuals in both Paris and Lyon declaring their occupation as embroiderer-designer (*brodeur-dessinateur*). For Saint-Aubin, the two were practically inseparable:

It is thus necessary that the Designer adds to his talent, the knowledge of the details and difficulties of Embroidery, in order to adapt [his designs] to what is possible in execution; just as it would be desirable that the Workers are at least familiar with the basic elements of Design, in order not to spoil the shapes & their placement.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ The organisation of production and the division of tasks in embroidery is examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

⁶⁵ 'le Dessin est la base & le fondement de la Broderie.' Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Sarah Piettre, 'An Iconographical Study of 18th Century Men's Waistcoats from the Collection of the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris', *Text*, 43 (2015-16), 27-32 (p. 27).

⁶⁷ 'Il détermine les formes & la belle distribution ; il donne de l'harmonie, regle les proportions, ajoute un nouveau mérite à l'ouvrage, par l'économie des différentes matieres, & l'opposition ou le mélange des différents procédés.' Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 4. Scheuer's translation, p. 17.

⁶⁸ 'Il faut donc que le Dessinateur joigne à son talent, la connoissance des détails & des difficultés de la Broderie, pour se conformer aux possibilités de l'exécution ; comme il seroit à desirer que

The relationship between designers and producers was thus of critical importance in executing a successful work of embroidery which would elicit the approval of the wearer. A beautiful design on paper was not a guarantee of a beautiful end product. The embroiderer's skill and taste in selecting the appropriate combination of techniques and materials, as well as the designer's knowledge of embroidery technique, were interdependent. A series of embroidery designs from the late eighteenth century held in the collections of the Musée des Tissus in Lyon is testament to this symbiotic relationship. These designs demonstrate that the technical knowledge of the designer and that of the embroiderer was closely intertwined. The formation of taste was a result of both the skill of the embroiderer and that of the designer.

Figure 2.3 is an embroidery design for a waistcoat dating to the late eighteenth century. The drawing is accompanied by written instructions in the top right-hand corner which read 'the daisies must be worked in blue silk [...] the decorative band in puce, the spangles in green knots, the grapes in *carmelite* knots'.⁶⁹ By giving clear instructions to the embroiderer about the type and colour of the material to be used for each section of the embroidery design, the designer retains a certain element of control over the execution of the design, thus ensuring that the finished product conformed to the standard of taste which he has created in the paper design. We can see similar instructions and notes for colours and materials in a number of illustrated embroidery designs from the period (figures 2.4 and 2.5). However, looking at these paper designs alone cannot convey what the finished embroidery would have looked like. Indeed, in figure 2.3, the designer has only referenced the elements of the design in which the colours do not necessarily correspond to that of the paint (for example 'puce' and 'carmelite'). Furthermore, in figure 2.4, the designer has itemised what the colour on the paper ought to correspond with in the finished embroidery, stating for example that the red parts of the design should be embroidered in orange. The embroiderer was thus entrusted to select the appropriate

les Ouvriers eussent au moins les premiers éléments du Dessin, pour ne pas corrompre les formes & les emmanchements'. Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ 'Il faut faire les marguerites en soye bleu [...] baguette en puce, les paillettes en neux [noeuds] vert, les raisins en neux [noeuds] carmeliste.' A/503/6 (35088/6). In his *Dictionnaire universel*, Furetière gave the definition of *carmelite* as a nun in the Order of the Carmelites. See Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, p. 319. The term possibly relates to a nun's habit, in which case it is conceivable that the corresponding colour to *carmelite* could be a shade of dark brown-black.

stitching techniques to bring the designer's vision to life from paper to textile. In figure 2.5, the description on both designs reads that the embroidery is to be in 'shaded silk'.⁷⁰ In the absence of further instructions, it is likely that the embroiderer, through their skill and experience, knew which colour palette and technique would best translate the subtle shading of the watercolour design into silk embroidery. Although not the same design, the pocket sample in figure 2.6 suggests how similar designs might have been translated by embroiderers onto silk. We can see here how shaded flowers, similar to those in figure 2.5, were created through a blending of different shades of coloured silks in satin stitch to mirror the depth achieved in the watercolour design.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.3. Embroidery design, watercolour on paper, approx. 18 × 15 cm, late eighteenth century. MT 35088.6 (A 503.6). © MTMAD.

⁷⁰ 'soye nuée'. *Dessins industriels, XVIIIe siècle, esquisses broderies pour vêtements*, 2.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.4. Embroidery design, watercolour on paper, approx. 23×19 cm, late eighteenth century. MT 35088.3 (A 503.3). © MTMAD.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.5. Embroidery designs, watercolour on paper, approx. 20 × 15 cm, late eighteenth century. *Dessins industriels, XVIIIe siècle, esquisses broderies pour vêtements, 2.* © MTMAD.

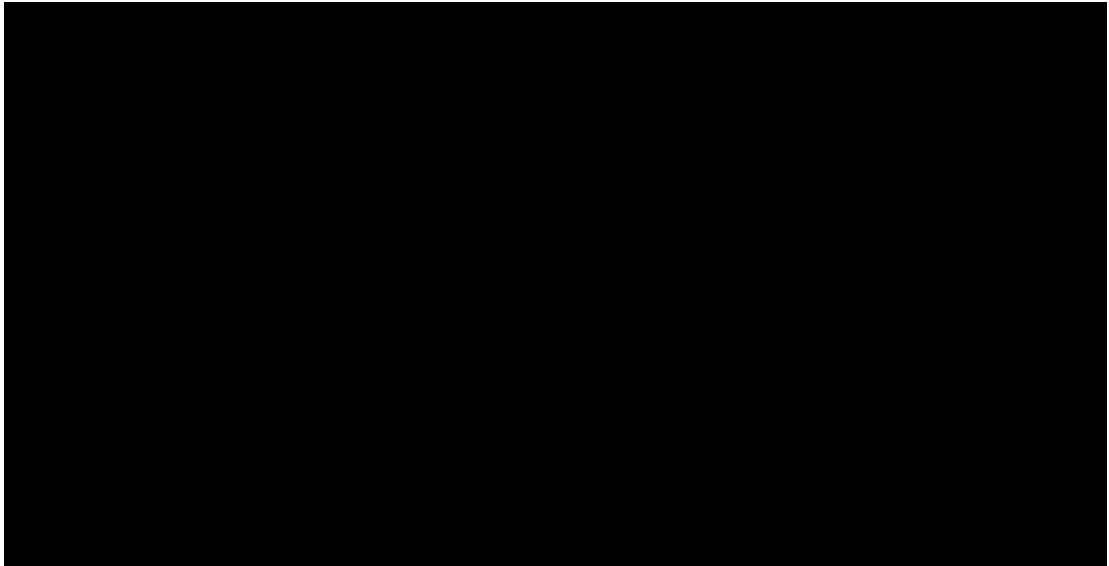


Figure 2.6. Salesman's sample, silk embroidery on satin, France, late eighteenth century.
20. 6 × 41. 3 cm. 1962-52-24. © Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

The skill and experience of both the designer and embroiderer were thus closely linked as they worked together to create tasteful embroidery. Whilst the beauty of these paper designs gives the objects the quality of works of art, the pattern numbers marked on these designs are a reminder of the presence of the consumer in this process. Read alongside other data, such as the account books of Pascal in which he records the pattern numbers that he sent to customers, the designs remind us that the designer-producer relationship was a commercial one, and that the formation of taste was shaped not only by contemporary notions of art, beauty and elegance, but also by profit. For contemporary economists and philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith, the rise of a commercial society, in which individuals were increasingly exposed to multiple forms of exchanges through trade, resulted in 'a refinement of manners as well as propagating better taste. The marketplace as much as the court created polite, refined and cultured people.'⁷¹ The marketplace not only created a polite 'people' with 'good taste', but also tasteful products. It was, in fact, enormously influential on the designs examined above. These designs were not simply plucked out of thin air, but were rather the product of a variety of interactions within the marketplace between consumers, merchants and designers. The following section will examine the range of designs that resulted from

⁷¹ Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. xix.

these interactions and analyse how these were created to appeal to the varied tastes of the consumers of embroidery.

2.3 Designing Good Taste

Whilst taste was debated on a conceptual level in contemporary written accounts and discussed between customers and merchants, the surviving objects and designs are tangible evidence of what could assume to be taste in embroidery design. Indeed, taste was relative, but in viewing embroidered objects as a luxury product and destined for a particular social class of consumer, it is possible to arrive at a broad taxonomy of ‘tasteful’ design for these types of products.⁷² As examined above, there was a shift in what one considered to be tasteful embroidery over the course of the eighteenth century, and this shift corresponded to the socio-political environment and changing attitudes towards luxury, politeness and enlightenment. The richly embroidered clothing of the earlier years of the *ancien régime* was publicly denounced in fashion periodicals such as the *Cabinet des modes, ou les modes nouvelle* from the 1780s onwards, and around the same time consumers sought to distance themselves from such outwardly displays of ostentation in order to signify their adherence to a set of enlightened principles. Yet consumption of embroidery, traditionally associated with the ‘old’ and corrupt luxury of the *ancien régime*, did not stop or decrease. In fact, the popularity of embroidered textiles significantly increased from the 1770s onwards, and this is suggested by surviving objects, correspondence and order books of embroiderers and embroidery merchants. The publication of Saint-Aubin’s *L’Art du brodeur* in the 1770s is further testament to the commercial interest in embroidery. Embroidery was repackaged and sold as a ‘new’ luxury and something which did not resemble the elaborate gold and silver designs of the early eighteenth century. Designers had a crucial role in shedding the old reputation of embroidery as being associated with the morally dubious luxury of the *ancien régime*, and creating designs which appealed to the enlightened outlook of still wealthy consumers. The new designs were not strictly bound by rules of sartorial court etiquette and enabled noble consumers to engage with the fashions of the day which were extolled in the commercial fashion press.

⁷² See for example Miller, ‘Paris-Lyon-Paris: Dialogue in the Design and Distribution of Patterned Silks in the 18th Century’, p. 145.

Writing as late as 1770, Saint-Aubin recognised that the nobility continued to be the main clientele for embroidery: ‘One must always have something new to offer as a choice to Noblemen, who rarely want a design that has been created for someone else’.⁷³ And herein lies the crux of the matter. For embroidery as a luxury product lent itself well to the principles of taste, novelty and individuality. As a handmade product, embroidered items were rarely exactly the same as each other. Designs may be similar, but the very nature of the handmade process of embroidery (with a needle and frame) meant that each piece was individual. Embroidery thus appealed to the elite consumer’s desire for goods which were novel and imitative, but at the same time demonstrated their individuality. This section deals with the main ways in which embroidery designers channelled the different tastes of their varied clientele to create designs which constituted ‘good taste’ in the second half of the century in order to demonstrate the flexibility of embroidery as a luxury product.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a preference for lighter embellishment, inspired by the popularity of what was termed the ‘modern taste’ (*goût moderne*) and what we now label as ‘rococo’, dominated embroidery design.⁷⁴ Macushla Baudis has suggested that embroidery design in the 1780s seemed to be a hybrid of both the ‘rococo’ and the ‘neoclassical’ styles. Designs adhered to the principles of distribution, proportion and symmetry which were associated with what art historians have termed the ‘neoclassical’ style, whilst replicating floral details from the ‘rococo’ style.⁷⁵ These labels,

⁷³ ‘il faut en avoir souvent de nouveaux, pour donner à choisir aux Seigneurs, qui ne veulent presque jamais du dessin, qui a été exécuté pour un autre.’ Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 32.

⁷⁴ On the rococo, see for example: Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Vernon Hyde Minor, *Baroque & Rococo: Art & Culture* (London: Laurence King, 1999); Emma Barker, ‘Rehabilitating the Rococo’, *The Oxford Art Journal*, 32/2 (2009), 306-13; Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Baroque and Rococo* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2012); Melissa Hyde and Scott, eds, *Rococo Echo: Art, History and Historiography* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2014). For a discussion of the rococo in textile design, see for example Natalie Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

⁷⁵ Macushla Goacher Baudis, ‘Embroidery for Male Suiting and Waistcoats in Lyon, 1780-1789: A Cultural Biography of the Designs in the National Museum of Ireland Collection Presented by J. H. Fitzhenry’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, National College of Art and Design, Dublin, 2008), p. 84.

however, have a tendency to conceal both continuity and gradual change in design. Whilst they have been applied by art historians of our own time as a way of distinguishing past chronologies, such labels neglect to account for any overlap in styles, designs and motifs. Indeed, contemporaries did not think in terms specific as 'neoclassical' and 'rococo', but rather were concerned with what was new or in the latest taste.

What was new in the eighteenth century was both a continuation of existing motifs and inspiration drawn from different sources to create a novel style. New products or styles introduced to the market in the eighteenth century were reconfigured to suit the tastes of their intended clientele.⁷⁶ In silk manufacturing, existing designs were updated on a seasonal basis by a change in the colour, size or placement of a motif, for example. The rest of the design would remain the same, appealing to the customer's established taste, yet satisfying the customer's desire for novelty. What Baudis has recognised as a hybridisation was rather an overlap of styles which was the result of the designer's exploration of new styles combined with existing motifs which continued to be popular with customers.

In his treatise on silk design for example, Joubert de l'Hiberderie wrote extensively on where silk designers could draw inspiration and addressed the delicate balance in creating a successful design, noting that variation and novelty were essential to catching the eye of the customer who was used to seeing something new every year.⁷⁷ Paper designs which were sold in the shops of merchants were an important resource for designers so that they could 'either obtain new ideas, or to not fall trap to the taste of others, nor to repeat that which has already been done.'⁷⁸ Joubert de l'Hiberderie further dedicated an entire chapter to the Lyonnais silk designer's annual visit to Paris, where he noted the numerous places from which a designer could draw inspiration. These included firstly the silk merchants' shops, then places as varied as the Cabinet d'Estampes at the Bibliothèque du Roi, the architecture of the Louvre, the Palais Royal, gardens, churches, the Manufacture Royal des Gobelins and de Porcelaine à Sève, the shops of seamstresses,

⁷⁶ See for example John Styles, 'Product Innovation in Early Modern London', *Past & Present*, 168 (August 2000), 124-69.

⁷⁷ Nicolas Joubert de l'Hiberderie, *Le dessinateur pour les fabriques d'étoffes d'or* (Paris: Vve Duchesne, 1774), p. 38.

⁷⁸ 'soit pour y puiser des idées nouvelles, soit pour ne pas tomber dans le goût des autres, ni répéter ce qui a déjà été fait.' Ibid., p. 86.

embroiderers and fan-makers, sculptors, and the Opera, amongst others.⁷⁹ There was, therefore, a close relationship between Paris and Lyon in matters of design and taste. This interdependency is further highlighted by Grognard's correspondence to his partners at Camille, Pernon et Cie in Lyon during the 1780s. In one letter for example, he asked for new silk samples for suits and gowns to be sent to him in Madrid, all of which should be 'in the Paris taste'.⁸⁰ This taste which was attributed to Paris, however, was created by designers in Lyon, who drew inspiration from the sights in the Capital and turned these ideas into tangible designs.⁸¹

As embroidery was closely linked to silk manufacturing, it is conceivable that embroidery designers drew inspiration from similar sources as silk designers. Indeed, some silk designers also designed embroidery, and vice versa. Engravings and prints sold during the eighteenth century often served as design sources for a range of trades and products. For example, a book of engraved designs published by Jombert in the 1750s was aimed at architects, painters, sculptors, gilders, carpenters, locksmiths, as well as embroiderers.⁸² The plates were not labelled with specific trades in mind, and so the designs could have been used for a variety of products, indicating that notions of taste were not necessarily specific to one type of product in the eighteenth century (figure 2.7). An album of assorted designs, which has been labelled as 'neoclassical' in the rare books collection at Winterthur Museum & Library and has been dated to the last years of the period (1775-1825), is similarly broad in its appeal to a range of trades.⁸³ Whilst some of

⁷⁹ Ibid., in particular pp. 86-112.

⁸⁰ 'le tout dans le gout de Paris.' BML Fonds général ms. 1923: 'Madrid' 13 December 1787.

⁸¹ See also Carlo Poni, 'Fashion as Flexible Production: The Strategies of the Lyons Silk Merchants in the Eighteenth Century', in *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization*, ed. by Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 37-74 (p. 54).

⁸² *Dessins de divers ornemens et moulures antiques et modernes, à la grecque : propres pour l'architecture, peinture, sculpture, orfèvrerie, broderie, marqueterie, damasquinerie, menuiserie, serrurerie, et autres arts. Avec le nom de chaque ornement* (Paris: Jombert, c. 1751).

⁸³ *Album of Neoclassical Designs, 1775-1825*. At least one of the designs in this collection has been engraved by Jean Hauer which is noted as being available for sale at 'Jean Gradmann'. Engravings by 'Johann Hauer, Aubsburg', presumably the same individual, are also held at V&A museum. Hauer produced engravings for a number of diverse artisans and also designed trade cards, some of which are held in the Waddesdon Manor Rothschild Trade Card collection.

the plates were evidently aimed at the building trades such as carpenters, many of the designs are unlabelled and could conceivably have influenced embroidery designs and motifs in the last decades of the eighteenth century (figure 2.8).

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.7. *Dessins de divers ornemens et moulures antiques et modernes, à la grecque: propres pour l'architecture, peinture, sculpture, orfèvrerie, broderie, marqueterie, damasquinerie, menuiserie, serrurerie, et autres arts. Avec le nom de chaque ornement* (Paris: Jombert, c. 1751), p. 4. WML NK1530 D47*.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.8. *Album of Neoclassical Designs*, 1775-1825, Plate 3. WMR NK1530 N43 F.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.9. Album of embroidery designs, watercolour on paper, approx. 30 × 50 cm, late eighteenth century. MT 35088.3 (A 503.3). © MTMAD.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.10. Album of embroidery designs, watercolour on paper, approx. 30 × 50 cm, late eighteenth century. MT 35088.3 (A 503.3). © MTMAD.

This album of embroidery designs in the Musée des Tissus in Lyon reflects the overlapping styles in the late eighteenth century, the inspiration for which was likely drawn from a variety of contemporary sources (figures 2.9 and 2.10). This album is part of a larger collection of albums of embroidery and silk designs which were compiled in the late nineteenth century, and although the manner in which the designs were compiled and arranged is not known, the collection is nevertheless a useful source for historians investigating the nature of Lyonnais textile design in the late eighteenth century.⁸⁴ This album indicates how embroidery designers sought to create designs which were commercially viable, in that they appealed to a clientele which had differing yet similar tastes. In these albums, we can see that a variety of old and new motifs co-exist not only on the pages of the albums, but within the designs themselves. In figure 2.9 for example, the floral motif in the top left design reflects the trend for the *goût moderne*, with its scroll-like, yet delicate floral sprays. Next to this, the top middle design is both, what art historians would term, ‘neoclassical’ and ‘rococo’: the geometric border encases a motif of a bird perched on top of a gazebo or trellis, a structural motif which reflects the new trend for a return to antiquity, but which is combined with the stylised and meandering flowers associated with the *goût moderne*. In the centre of the page, a design for an architectural motif reflects the contemporary trend for classical structures which are reminiscent of Ancient Greece and Rome. Yet the smaller designs which surround it are very much of the preceding style of the *goût moderne*, with graceful scrolls and bouquets of flowers in various colours. In figure 2.10, the naturalistic ornament and meandering

⁸⁴ This album is part of the Bergeret and Belmont collection of embroidery designs at the Musée des Tissus in Lyon (MT 35088.1-9). This collection was acquired by the museum, along with the Reybaud collection of embroidery design albums, in the late nineteenth century. The Bergeret and Belmont collection was compiled by Claude Bergeret (1814-91), a painter and librarian at the Palais des Arts, during the nineteenth century. Both Bergeret and Jules Reybaud (1807-68) were major suppliers to the museum of rare French textiles and drawings. See Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, *Gilets brodés: modèles du XVIIIe, musée des Tissus, Lyon* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), p. 12. The designs in this album were therefore presumably collected and preserved for their uniqueness and beauty. It is not known whether the placement of the designs within the album was part of a conscious ordering on the part of Bergeret. The straight-cut of the buttonholes and waistcoat edges in the drawings indicate that they were designs for the *gilets* of the late eighteenth century and were likely to have been created around a similar time to each other.

scrolls of flowers are similarly juxtaposed with geometrical patterning on the same page and reflect the designs in figure 2.9. These pages are just one example of the fact that designs which incorporated a mixture of existing and new motifs were created by embroidery designers to satisfy the varied tastes of its wealthy clientele. The designs would have been available together around a similar period of time, indicated by the straight cut of the waistcoat and buttonholes.

A number of embroidered waistcoats in the V&A collections are further material evidence of the co-existence of these two styles. Figure 2.11 is a waistcoat from the 1780s made of cream silk with a weft of silver thread and embroidered in black silk, gilt spangles and black and white glass beads. The embroidery of this waistcoat incorporates a juxtaposition of geometric and angular lines with flowing curves. Figure 2.12 is a waistcoat dating from the 1780s or 1790s, made of cream silk and embroidered in coloured silks. This waistcoat similarly displays an embroidery design which incorporates features of both styles: the stylised floral design which runs the length of the waistcoat, and which is embroidered in satin stitch of various shades of pink and blue, is rather 'rococo' in nature whilst the embroidered diagonal lines of brown waves and green circles reflect the new trend for symmetry and geometry.

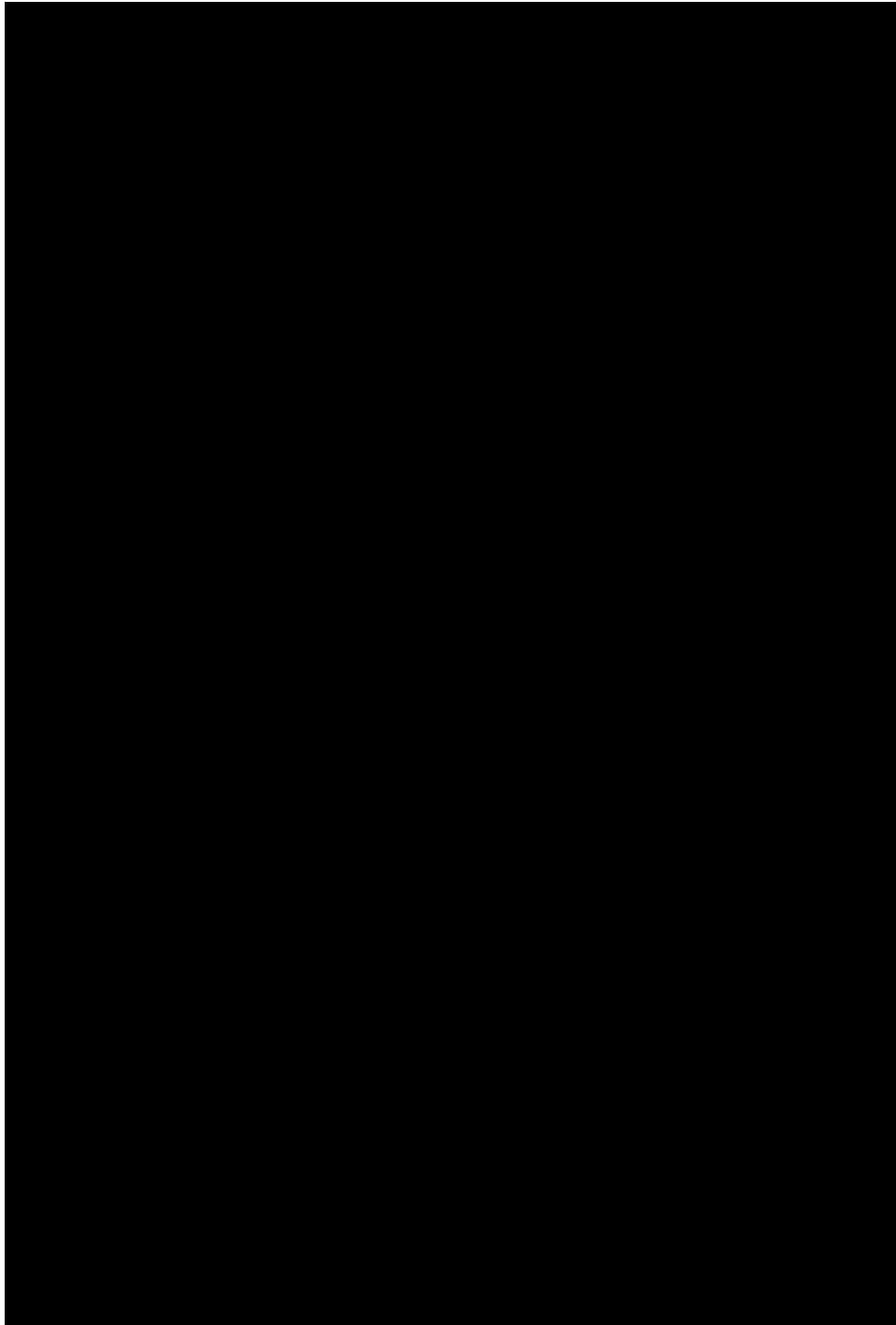


Figure 2.11. Waistcoat, silk and silver embroidery on satin, France, 1780-89. T. 133-1921. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

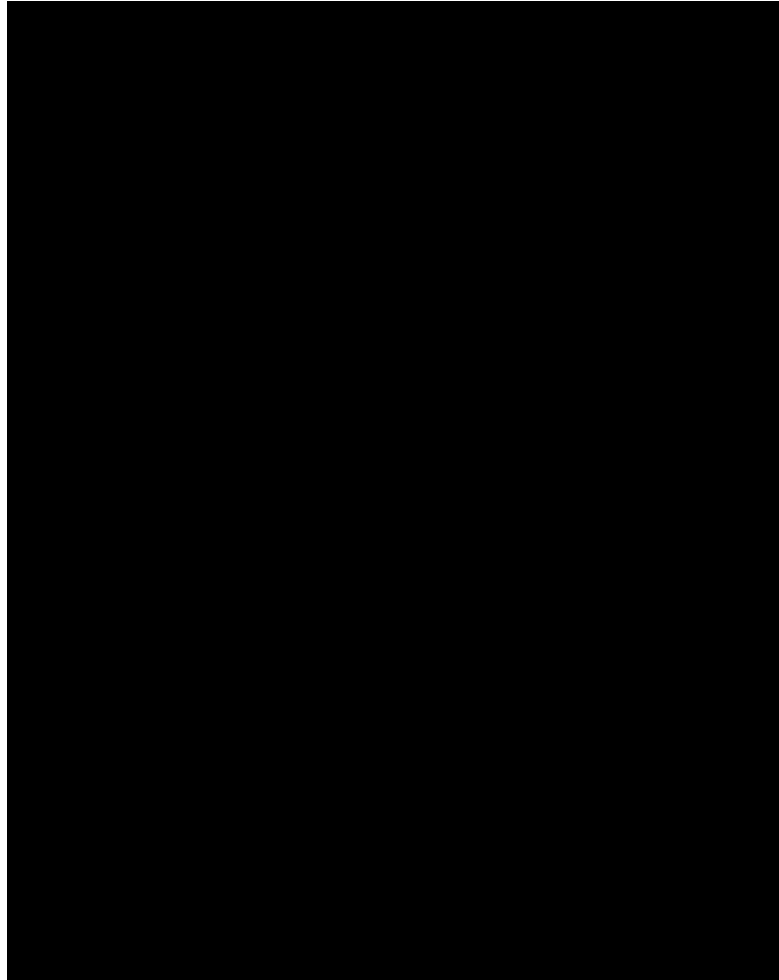


Figure 2.12. Waistcoat, silk embroidery on silk, France, 1780s-90s. T. 710A-1972. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

The variety of these embroidery styles suggests that there was a range that appealed to a complex clientele to whom embroiderers catered. It indicates the task of designing a product which appealed to a heterogeneous nobility, within which there were differing ideas of taste. As Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger have stated and as Scott has also asserted in her study of the social meanings behind the ‘rococo’ style in interior design, the *goût moderne*, was aligned with new wealth, commerce and fashion. The nobility criticised the commercial aspirations behind the newly wealthy, who sought to imitate the visual signs of the aristocracy through material objects. The use of gold and mirrors which were prevalent in the interiors of the *goût moderne* were denounced by the nobility as ‘vulgar’. The hostility towards this new aesthetic style went hand-in-hand with a criticism of the new commercial classes of mid-eighteenth-century France and a ‘backlash’ ensued

in the form of a return to the ideals of classicism and antiquity.⁸⁵ It could therefore be suggested that the melange of styles seen within these designs and objects appealed to a broad clientele which had differing ideas about the meaning of taste, luxury and modernity. Furthermore, in combining elements of two recognisable styles, these designs also appealed to a consumer desire for novelty, whilst at the same time being visually familiar.

Indeed, novelty was an important way in which designers distanced embroidery from its associations with court etiquette and reconfigured it as a fashionable luxury product. By the 1780s, and despite the fashion for more sombre and plain suits inspired by the English fashions, the popularity of men's embroidered waistcoats had significantly increased.⁸⁶ Whilst the fashion for floral design continued well into the last decades of the eighteenth century, the pictorial waistcoat entered the market as a popular embroidered product in the mid-1780s. On 15 October 1785, the *Cabinet des modes* described these as follows:

The prettiest waistcoats are decorated with embroideries representing on some, at each buttonhole, a lion, a tiger, or any other animal; others, on the surface, have large flowers, trees, which extend their branches; on others still, mostly on the pockets, there are cottages, hamlets, villages;⁸⁷

Almost seven months later, a subsequent issue of the *Cabinet des modes* from 1 June 1786 informed its readers that 'For the last eight days or so, the drapers and silk merchants at the Palais Royal, have been offering for sale a very large quantity of Waistcoats in the

⁸⁵ See: Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, 'The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates', in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2003), pp. 7-27 (pp. 20-1); Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, p. 216, p. 226, pp. 234-8.

⁸⁶ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, p. 122.

⁸⁷ 'Les plus jolis gilets sont ornés de broderies représentant, les uns, à chaque boutonnière, un lion, un tigre, ou tout autre animal ; les autres, sur la surface, de larges fleurs, des arbres, qui étendent leurs branches ; d'autres, sur-tout aux poches, des chaumières, des hameaux, des villes;' *Cabinet des modes*, 15 October 1785, p. 183.

latest taste, & which are entirely capable of pleasing one by their rich elegance.⁸⁸ The nature of the waistcoats' taste was their embroidery. The variety and extent of the designs are described in detail. Animal motifs were enthusiastically explained, whereby 'more than two hundred animals are embroidered or painted on the same Waistcoat', as were others of violet, blue, green and silk which were 'covered with embroideries representing large and tall marine plants, tree branches, [...] waterfalls, pyramids, & other designs.'⁸⁹ Further, that:

Others still, & those which are richer [...] of white Gros de Tours, or of white taffeta, & are covered in embroideries in gold & in a diverse range of coloured silks, representing trees which follow the bottom of the Waistcoat, & which rise up towards the top, spreading out expansive and wide branches [...] Other Waistcoats, no less rich than these last, [...] are covered in embroideries of diverse colours, representing hamlets, farms & countryside, which Workers are depicted cultivating.⁹⁰

The author states that 'Almost all of these Waistcoats come from the Manufactories of Lyon.'⁹¹ Baudis' research has shown that embroidery designers from Lyon were well-placed to produce such designs, which relied heavily on the concept of novelty whilst also requiring in-depth knowledge of the history of art, classical antiquity, sculpture and architecture. This, she argues, was due in part to the nature of their training. Embroidery designers who undertook training at the école gratuite de dessin in Lyon, which opened

⁸⁸ 'Depuis huit jours environ, les Marchands de Draps & les Marchands de Soie du Palais Royal, ont mis en vente & débitent en très-grande quantité des Gilets d'un goût nouveau, & qui sont bien capables de plaire par leur riche élégance.' *Cabinet des modes*, 1 June 1786, pp. 108-9.

⁸⁹ 'Plus de deux cent animaux sont brodés ou peints sur le même Gilet.'; 'couverts de broderies représentant de larges & hautes plantes marines, des branches d'arbre [...] des cascades, des pyramides, & autres dessins.' Ibid., p. 109.

⁹⁰ 'D'autres encore, & ceux qui sont les plus riches [...] en Gros de Tours blanc, ou en taffetas blanc, & sont couverts de broderies en or & en soie de diverses couleurs, représentant des arbres qui prennent du bas de Gilet, & s'élèvent jusques vers le haut, en répandant des branches très-étendues & très larges [...] D'autres Gilets, non moins riches que ces avant-derniers [...] sont chargés de broderies en diverses couleurs, représentant des hameaux, des fermes & des campagnes, où sont des Laboureurs qui cultivent.' Ibid., pp. 109-10.

⁹¹ 'Presque tous ces Gilets viennent des Manufactures de Lyon.' Ibid., p. 110.

in 1756, were exposed to the school's broad curriculum which privileged an academic education that provided its students with knowledge of traditional historical references, as well as practical drawing skills. The Lyonnais embroidery designers were thus equipped with a broad 'visual vocabulary' which contributed to their talent for producing pictorial designs by the late eighteenth century.⁹² Such designs can be seen in the collections of the Musée des Tissus, for example. The designs below reflect the entries in the *Cabinet des modes*, whereby they depict a variety of animal, architectural, pastoral and exotic motifs (figures 2.13-17).

⁹² Baudis, 'Embroidery for Male Suiting and Waistcoats in Lyon, 1780-1789: A Cultural Biography of the Designs in the National Museum of Ireland Collection Presented by J. H. Fitzhenry', pp. 46-7.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figures 2.13-17. Assorted designs from album of embroidery designs, watercolour on paper, approx. 30 × 50 cm, late eighteenth century. MT 35088.4 (A 503.4) and MT 35088.6 (A 503.6). © MTMAD.

In her study of a collection of men's waistcoats in the Musée Galliera collections in Paris, Sarah Piettre has shown that popular motifs, such as the animals and pastoral scenes described by the *Cabinet des modes* and seen in the embroidery designs above might have reflected the political and social preoccupations of the wearer.⁹³ Designs were inspired by current events such as 'balloonmania' in the early 1780s, when the race for hot-air balloon invention was at its height (figure 2.18); by pastoral and gardening scenes due to the interest in studying nature and botany; and by flowers which Piettre suggests the consumer would have been 'well acquainted with this language and its codes.'⁹⁴ Indeed, Baudis has categorised Lyonnais embroidery designs for pictorial waistcoats into five distinct categories: nature, romance, contemporary life, antiquity and exoticism.⁹⁵ If we are to interrogate these design motifs further, it becomes apparent that these have distinct social meanings which are for the most part, decipherable or significant only to the elite classes during this period. For example, and as Baudis has recognised, the *hameaux* or hamlets, described above in the *Cabinet des modes* reflect a trend for the wealthy elites to build smaller versions within the grounds of their estates. This was part of a wider enthusiasm among the genteel classes for engaging with the pastoral through the management of their estates. Furthermore, scenes of antiquity would have required a certain level of education in order to appreciate the cultural meanings behind the classical structures, and romance scenes often reflected contemporary literature such as *Paul et Virginie*, a novel written in 1788 by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Such embroidery designs, whilst visual, nevertheless required its wearer to be literate in order to appreciate the cultural message which they conveyed.

⁹³ Piettre, 'An Iconographical Study of 18th Century Men's Waistcoats from the Collection of the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris'.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹⁵ Baudis, 'Embroidery for Male Suiting and Waistcoats in Lyon, 1780-1789: A Cultural Biography of the Designs in the National Museum of Ireland Collection Presented by J. H. Fitzhenry', p. 85.

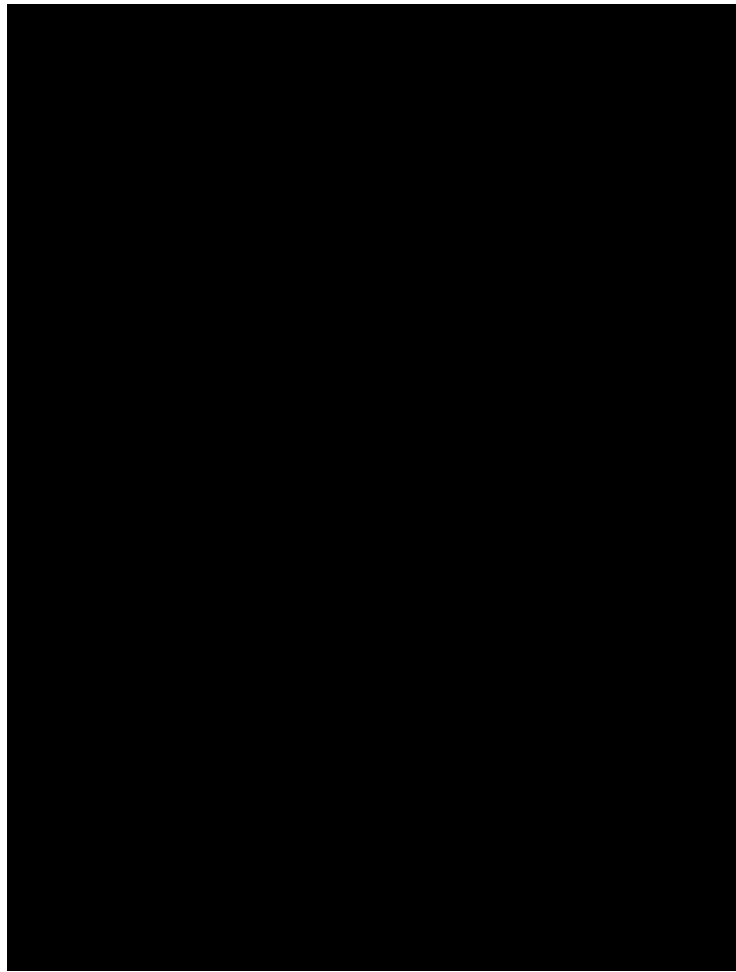


Figure 2.18. Waistcoat, silk embroidery on silk, France, 1785-90. T. 200-2016. ©
Victoria and Albert Museum.

Designers in Lyon were therefore well-versed in the interests of their clients and shaped these shared values and concepts into a standard of embroidery design. Furthermore, Baudis has noted that the pictorial waistcoat was an exception to design practice in the luxury trades. Whereas it was usual practice, particularly in silk manufacture, to produce novel designs through simply altering an existing design, it is very rare to find two surviving pictorial waistcoats with the exact same design.⁹⁶ Such embroidery thus appealed to the discerning consumer who desired a design which would be different to most of their peers, as suggested by Saint-Aubin.

Many of the pictorial designs described in the *Cabinet des modes* were embroidered in tambour, a technique which was introduced into France from Asia around 1760. The

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

tambour technique enabled embroiderers to execute designs in chain stitch, a technique which lent itself well to pictorial scenes because it was able to achieve a high level of depth and subtlety. The designs on these embroidered waistcoats from the late eighteenth century, demonstrate the level of detail which could be achieved through tambour embroidery (figures 2.19-2.20).

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Figure 2.19a. Waistcoat shapes, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. MT 29821. © MTMAD.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 2.19b. Detail of waistcoat shapes, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. MT
29821. © MTMAD.



Figure 2.20a. Waistcoat panel, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. 878-1891. ©
Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

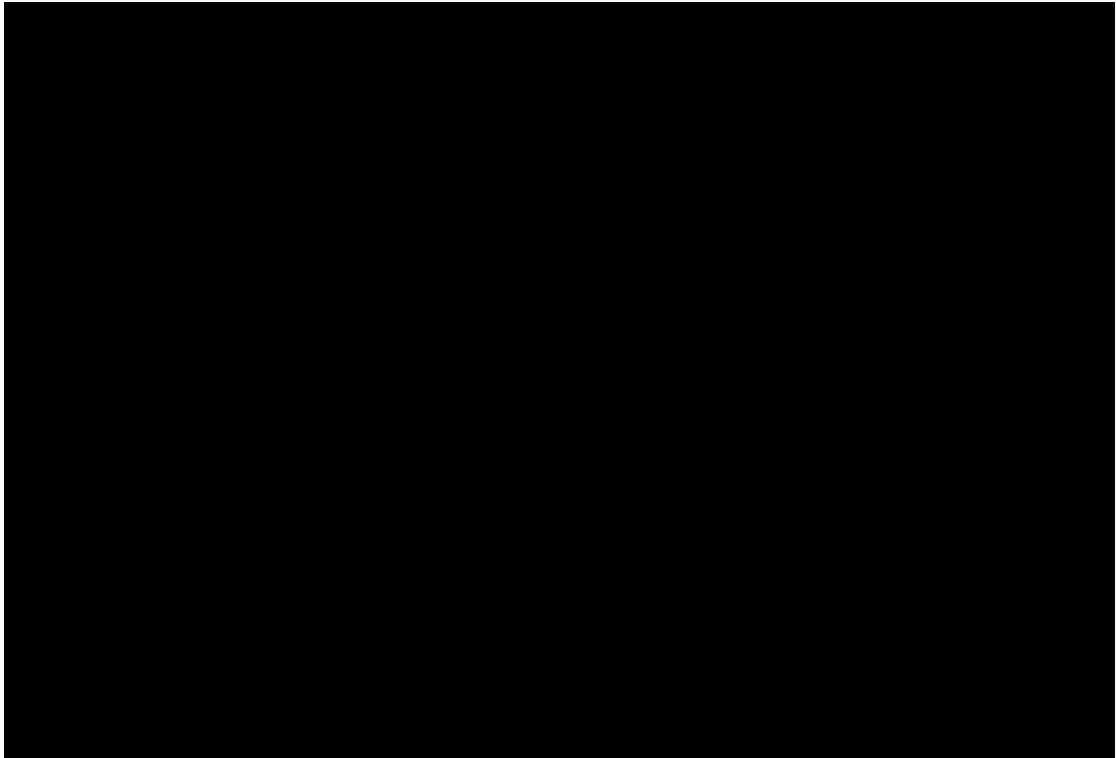


Figure 2.20b. Detail of waistcoat panel, silk embroidery on satin, France, 1780s. 878-1891. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

It was not only the designs themselves which constituted fashion in embroidery, but the technique itself. For tambour was an Asian technique imported into Europe and as Maxine Berg has demonstrated in her research on luxury in the eighteenth century, the taste for Asian imports among elite and middling class consumers encouraged innovation through imitation: ‘The key to this development was the inspiration in design, variety, and aesthetic quality provided by Eastern or oriental luxuries. Manufacturers and inventors practised an eighteenth-century concept of imitation; eighteenth-century designers and consumers adopted ‘imitation’ as a principle of taste’.⁹⁷ The consumption of Asian luxuries such as textiles, porcelain and lacquer-ware encouraged British manufacturers in particular to imitate these goods which encouraged a culture of innovation in product design and manufacturing. Yet tambour embroidery inverts this concept. The technique was imitated by French embroiderers, yet the designs that it was used to create did not imitate Asian designs. Rather, the technique was used to produce familiar European designs whilst improving the process.

⁹⁷ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 23.

Tambour embroidery could thus be seen as a novel way in which embroidery designers and embroiderers sought to cater to the tastes of their clientele. It can be speculated that in imitating a technique imported from Asia, the embroiderers created a product which appealed to the taste for Asian luxuries. Moreover, it lent the design a degree of taste, novelty and imitation at the same time. By wearing an embroidery design which both signified one's adherence to the principles of taste (i.e. the technique) and individuality (a bespoke design), such embroidery enabled its elite clientele to visually display their shared taste. Indeed, evidence from Grantham's letters show that he was aware of what tambouring was, with him writing in 1778 that 'Munro, has the prettiest waistcoats embroidered with tambour [...] he has several [...] to give me once at Madrid.'⁹⁸ Although speculative, it could be suggested that tambour embroidery was popular among elite consumers such as Grantham and his peers.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that tambour embroidery was specifically connected with Lyon. Contemporary written accounts, particularly needlework manuals aimed at women, suggest that it was highly likely that tambour work was produced in Lyon rather than Paris. Between 1795 and 1798, Johann Friedrich Netto, a Leipzig-based art teacher and author, produced a series of embroidery instruction manuals aimed predominantly at women. Amongst the illustrations and patterns, there are commentaries on embroidery techniques in which Netto clearly aligns the tambour technique specifically with Lyon.⁹⁹ Further to this and writing in 1826, Elisabeth Celnart asserted in her *Manuel des demoiselles* that a new type of tambour embroidery had emerged out of Lyon which was faster to execute.¹⁰⁰ In Lyon itself, the bankruptcy records of embroidery merchants evidence the fact that there were female embroiderers who specialised in this technique, *brodeuses au tamis*, who were employed directly by embroidery

⁹⁸ BAR L 30/17/4/112: 'Letter from Grantham, Madrid to Nanny', 17 July 1775 and BAR L 30/15/54/54: 'Letter from Grantham, Aranjuez to Frederick, Whitehall', 30 June 1778.

⁹⁹ Johann Friedrich Netto, *Wasch-Bleich-Platt-une Naeb-Buch, zum Selbstunterricht für Damen, welche sich mit diesen Arbeiten beschäftigen* (Leipzig: Voss und Compagnie, 1796); Netto, *Zeichen- Mahler- und Stickerbuch zur Selbstbelehrung für Damen welche sich mit diesen Künsten beschäftigen, von Johann Friedrich Netto, Zeichenmeister in Leipzig ; mit 48 Kupfertafeln und einem auf Taffet mit Seide und Gold gestickten Modelltuche* (Leipzig: Voss und Compagnie, 1795-8).

¹⁰⁰ Elisabeth Celnart, *Manuel des demoiselles : ou, Arts et métiers qui leur conviennent, et dont elles peuvent s'occuper avec agrément, tels que la couture, la broderie, le tricot, la dentelle, la tapisserie, les bourses, les ouvrages en filets, en chenille, en ganse, en perles, en cheveux, etc., etc.* (Paris: Roret, 1826), p. 66.

and silk merchants. Finally, the proliferation of orders for tamboured embroidery in the order books of Lyon-based embroidery merchants suggest that this was indeed a technique that was certainly practised widely there.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the formation of taste in embroidery design was the product of a multitude of interactions between different agents in the production and buying process. The designer acted upon incomplete pieces of information relayed via merchants to produce embroidery designs which were aesthetically pleasing and in the latest taste. Yet attributing primacy to the designer in the formation of tasteful embroidery design, as Saint-Aubin did, ignores the role of the consumer and the merchant. The consumers' preoccupation with displaying 'good taste' arguably shaped the formation of embroidery design during the eighteenth century as embroidered motifs, particularly during the later years of the period, came to reflect contextually relevant political and social concerns. The merchant acted as a 'middle-man' who transmitted information about consumer preferences to the designers and producers, but who also acted in the role of taste advisor to their elite clientele.

Contemporary commentators such as Voltaire expounded the virtues of the powers of the senses and the imagination, often dismissing the need for a particular knowledge to appreciate taste and beauty. Yet if we are to read the consumption of embroidery through the lens of Bourdieu's later theory, consumers were not exercising 'proper aesthetic judgement' when they commissioned embroidery, but rather a judgement of taste which was socially constructed through class distinctions and boundaries.¹⁰¹ These distinctions and boundaries were in turn recognised by the merchant who relayed such information to the embroiderer through references to pricing, colour and material. The designer would then shape such information into a design which he believed would suit the taste of the client. Judgements of taste and aesthetics were exercised primarily by the embroidery designer whose professional training in drawing and design enabled him to manipulate the principles of proportion and colour in order

¹⁰¹ The term 'proper aesthetic judgement' is a term used by Styles and Vickery. See Styles and Vickery, 'Introduction', in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, p. 14.

to arrive at a standard of taste. Although artisans were not considered to be of the polite and genteel classes, who were perceived as being the arbiters of taste during this period, the designer nevertheless had a major role in setting the standard of taste. It was his specialised artisanal knowledge, rather than the knowledge of the consumer, which enabled the consumer to exercise a degree of aesthetic judgement, and thus taste.

This chapter has also challenged the assumption that Paris was the sole centre and arbiter of taste during this period. The case of the embroidery trade demonstrates that geographies of taste, particularly towards the end of the eighteenth century, were much more complicated than this. Examining the role of different actors within the embroidery trade reshapes the paradigm of taste geography by showing that taste formation was much more fluid. Lyon played a more prominent role than hitherto thought and embroidery from Lyon was highly desired in its own right towards the end of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER 3

Refashioning Etiquette? Selling and Buying Embroidery in the Eighteenth Century

Introduction

This chapter analyses the mechanisms through which professionally-produced French embroidery was sold, marketed and distributed throughout the eighteenth century. It argues that embroidery was retailed in accordance with two parallel streams of the same market: one which was dictated by the etiquette and tradition of the court, and the other which was largely driven by fashion. Whilst the former was a relatively stable market and endured well into the late eighteenth century, the latter developed during the second half of the century, gaining significant ground from the 1770s onwards. The two did not necessarily serve a different clientele. Rather, the customers who employed the services of an embroiderer directly for their court appearances were the same ones who shopped in the fashionable shops of Paris for embroidery. As a result, the retail channels of the embroidery trade diverged in order to meet the myriad needs and desires of its elite clientele. The flexibility of embroidery as a luxury product enabled elite customers to simultaneously adhere to the requirements of court etiquette and participate in the world of fashion: duty of rank was not necessarily at odds with the fast-paced fashions of the city. An examination of retailing, distribution and marketing highlights further the interdependency of Paris and Lyon in the embroidery trade.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, ‘fashionable’ embroidery was characterised by its ‘novelty’. John Styles has argued that novelty during this period was counterbalanced by the ‘consumers’ attachment to established tastes, by their investment in notions of hierarchy, order and stability [...] and, in particular, by their failure to automatically ascribe a use or a meaning to new products.’¹ Embroidery in the ‘new’ taste was reconfigured to satiate consumers’ desire for novelty whilst simultaneously maintaining a degree of recognisability. This was achieved not only through design innovation, as previously explored, but also through the marketing strategies of the Paris

¹ John Styles, ‘Product Innovation in Early Modern London’, *Past & Present*, 168 (2000), 124-69 (p. 126).

marchands merciers and Lyon embroidery and silk merchants, who along with the commercial fashion press of the late eighteenth century, reformulated embroidery as a new and fashionable product.

This chapter will first examine the role of the court embroiderers from the late seventeenth century to the mid eighteenth century, before analysing how the same courtly clientele shopped for fashionable embroidery sold by the *marchands merciers* of Paris during this period, noting in particular the importance of Lyon-produced embroidery to Parisian retailers by the later years of the eighteenth century. It will then analyse how Lyonnais embroidery merchants were able to successfully supply Paris consumers with embroidery through the use of samples. Finally, this chapter will interrogate the practicalities of how fashionable embroidery was retailed by the end of the eighteenth century through an analysis of the second-hand market and the ready-embroidered panels which gained popularity from the 1770s onwards. It will engage with the nuances of the concept of 'ready-made', examining the complexity of the term within the context of professionally-embroidered waistcoats.

An examination of the retailing practices of embroiderers and embroidery merchants through sources as diverse as bankruptcy records, trade cards, notary documents and objects provides a new understanding of the market for embroidery as one which, despite supplying a product steeped in tradition, was fluid and receptive to the changing demands of its clientele. Examining retailing practices within the French embroidery trade during the eighteenth century is important for several reasons. Firstly, an analysis of the retailing activities of an ancillary trade of the luxury market provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the production, distribution and consumption of luxury goods during this period. To date, few studies have examined the myriad ways in which luxury goods reached shopkeepers such as the *marchands merciers*, and as a result we know less about the retailing and distribution activities of the auxiliary trades involved in the production of luxury goods. The embroiderers, for example, were responsible for what was often the most expensive part of the finished product, the exterior decoration. Yet we know next to nothing about their commercial relationship with their clientele, the mercers who may have commissioned and sold their work, or the ways in which embroidery was advertised. Examining the ways in which embroidery was sold and bought in the eighteenth century enables us to understand more fully the workings of a luxury trade which had a varied clientele, which diversified over the course of the century.

On 1 October 1786, the editors of the popular fortnightly fashion periodical the *Cabinet des modes, ou les modes nouvelles* denounced the recent fashion amongst young men for wearing suits embroidered with gold. The editors declared disparagingly that:

Upon examining an embroidered suit, one feels a confusion, a muddle which displeases and fatigues the eye. If it is not exactly that which makes us want to abandon embroidery, it is that those who believe they are distinguished by a rich suit, see themselves soon challenged by anybody and anyone, because each of us can buy, quite cheaply, an embroidered suit from a second-hand clothes dealer; & once on the body, no one will ask whether it was bought ready-made, or whether one had it made.²

In a denunciation of the richly embroidered suits which were popular at court during the eighteenth century, the editors suggested that these garments were 'richer than elegant' and since anyone could buy such a suit at a second-hand clothes dealer (*fripier*), it could not be considered a marker of distinction or taste.³ Yet just two weeks later in the subsequent issue on 15 October, the reader was informed of the latest fashion for embroidered satin waistcoats.⁴ The *Cabinet des modes* thus alerts historians to the fact that not all embroidery during this period was the same, even that being promoted to the same clientele. This subtle product differentiation made perfect sense to the contemporary reader of the *Cabinet des modes*, who would have been comfortable with the many nuances of fashion and taste with which the editors of such fashion journals filled their pages.⁵ Peter McNeil has noted that the worlds of fashion and print were closely interrelated and

² 'En examinant un habit brodé, on sent une confusion, un emmêlage qui déplaît à l'œil, & le fatigue. Si ce n'est pas tout-à-fait cela qui fait quitter la broderie, c'est que ceux qui ont cru se distinguer par un habit riche, se le voient bientôt disputer par quiconque le veut, parce que chacun peut acheter, à assez bon compte, un habit brodé chez un Frippier ; & qu'une fois sur le corps, personnes ne demande si on l'a acheté tout fait, ou si on l'a fait faire.' *Cabinet des modes, ou les modes nouvelles*, 1 October 1786, pp. 172-3.

³ 'plus riches qu'élégans', *ibid.*

⁴ *Cabinet des modes*, 15 October 1786, pp. 183-4.

⁵ Until the emergence of the specialised fashion press in the late eighteenth century, information about the latest sartorial trends had been recounted in periodicals including the *Mercur* (1672-1791) and to some extent, the *Journal des sçavans* (1665-1792).

that ‘the way in which people learnt about fashion was transformed over the course of the eighteenth century. Fashion can be conceptualised as a form of knowledge; one requires knowledge of what is in fashion to be a participant.’⁶ Fashion journals such as the *Galerie des modes et costumes français* (1778-87) and the *Cabinet des modes* (1785-86) disseminated the latest fashion ‘knowledge’ to their readers through engravings of the latest outfits alongside textual descriptions. The editors of the *Cabinet des modes* aimed to encourage participation in fashion and proclaimed its broad appeal to ‘all classes of society’.⁷

The *habit brodé* of which the *Cabinet des modes* complained had been worn throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as an essential part of court dress. Lavishly-embroidered court suits such as that in figure 3.1 were required by anyone attending Versailles right up until the Revolution. Foreign visitors for example, would buy an embroidered suit upon their arrival in Paris to ensure they adhered to the visual etiquette of the French court.⁸ It may not have been considered ‘elegant’ – a synonym here for tasteful or fashionable – by the editors of the *Cabinet des modes*, but it certainly held an established place in the world of consumer goods in late eighteenth-century Paris. At the same time and simultaneously with the birth of the fashion press in France, a variety of other embroidered products, such as waistcoats, muffs and shoes, proliferated as fashionable luxury garments and accessories on sale at the glittering shops of the *marchands merciers* in the most prestigious shopping districts of Paris, namely the rue Saint-Honoré and the Palais Royal.

⁶ Peter McNeil, “‘Beauty in Search of Knowledge’: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the World of Print”, in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles and Innovation in Europe 1500-1800*, ed. by Evelyn Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Pasold Research Fund, 2017), pp. 223-53 (p. 225).

⁷ ‘toutes les classes de la Société’. *Cabinet des modes*, 15 November 1785, p. 3.

⁸ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 75.

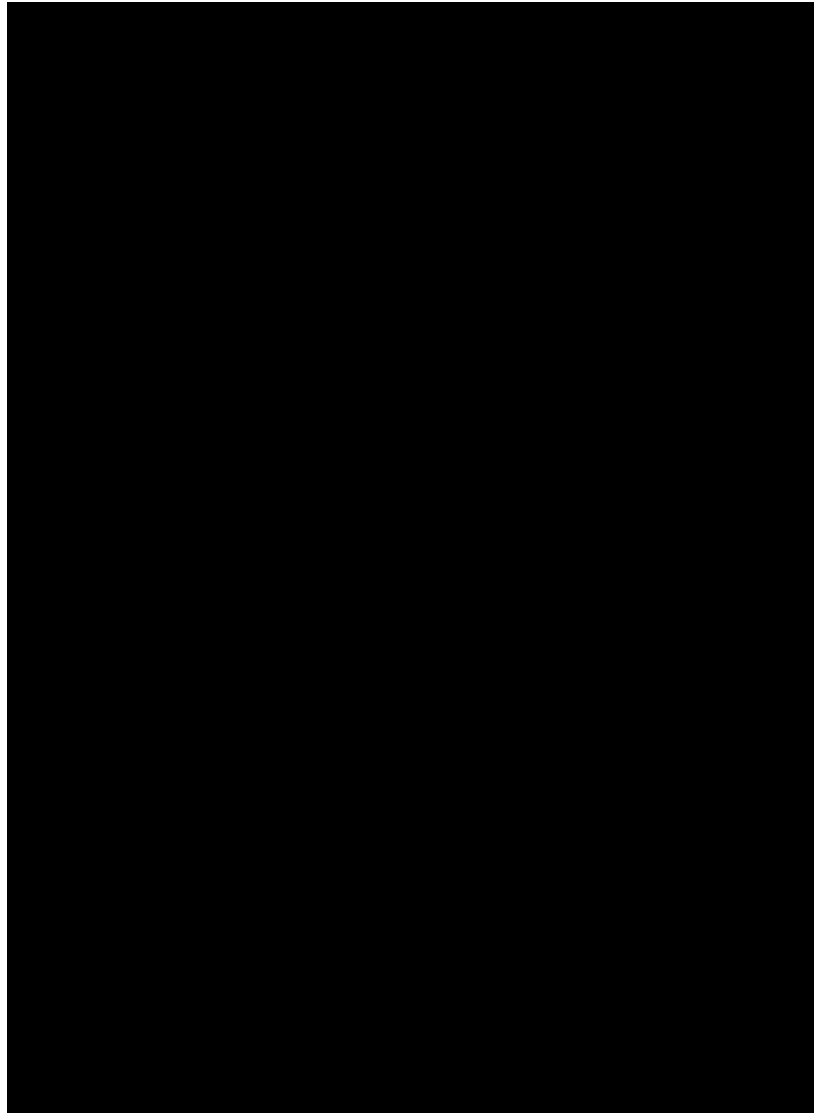


Figure 3.1. Formal ensemble, silk embroidery on figured silk, France, 1790-1800. T.148 to B-1924. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

The October 1786 issues of the *Cabinet des modes* are a useful entry point for interrogating the multifaceted market for embroidery in eighteenth-century France. Embroidery was not a straightforward luxury product as the *Cabinet des modes* suggested, and not all embroidery was fashionable. The embroiderers of eighteenth-century France served a clientele who demanded very different products according to the competing notions of courtly etiquette and tradition on the one hand, and the fashionability of the cosmopolitan city on the other. New modes of consuming further impacted on the trade of embroidery over the course of the eighteenth century. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, professional embroiderers catered mainly to a courtly clientele who resided either at Versailles, Paris or foreign courts, as well as the Church and military. Products were bespoke as they were designed and produced to the requirements of

specific individuals. As the century progressed and consumers demanded a greater variety of embroidered products, the channels through which embroidery was sold increased and diversified. By the middle of the eighteenth century, not only was embroidery commissioned on an individual basis, directly between embroiderer and customer, but it was available for instant purchase in shops. In the 1770s and 1780s in particular, there was an increase in the number of businesses which sold embroidery in its many different forms. These included mercers (*marchands merciers*), lace and trimming merchants (*marchands passementiers*), gold braid merchants (*marchands galons d'or*), and fashion merchants (*marchands de modes*). At the same time, a system of distribution for embroidered clothing co-existed with these markets in the form of a thriving second-hand market.

The *Cabinet des modes* is useful for exploring the practical ways in which embroidery was sold in this respect. For example, the phrase 'once on the body, no one will ask whether it was bought ready-made, or whether one had it made' necessitates a discussion of the concept of 'ready-made', which is rendered complicated in the context of embroidery. The 'ready-made' clothing industry in France did not develop fully until the early nineteenth century. Philippe Perrot has noted that several developments during this time heralded the beginning of 'ready-made' on a large scale in Paris. These included the innovative activities of the mercer Pierre Parissot in 1824, including the opening of his shop *La Belle Jardinière* on the Quai aux Fleurs and his subsequent use of the division of labour, a technique for the simultaneous cutting of cloth, and the introduction of clearly-marked fixed prices on his products. The re-organised National Guard necessitated the stockpiling of finished army uniforms in a range of sizes. The workshops which produced these were the first companies to produce ready-made clothing on such a large scale in France. Ready-made civilian clothing was to follow in the 1840s with the rational division of labour and improvements in cutting and sewing techniques.⁹ In the fields of fashion and dress history, there is an emphasis on the making up of garments in discussions of 'ready-made'. Beverly Lemire for example has noted that the quilted petticoat was produced on a 'ready-made' basis, since it was a staple garment of the female wardrobe

⁹ See Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 36-57.

and did not require specific sizing; the waistband could be adjusted to fit by adjustable tapes, or the addition of hooks and eyes or buttons.¹⁰

In the context of the embroidery trade, we are examining the concept of ‘ready-made’ at an intermediate stage, rather than at the final stage of assembly. The ways in which this phrase can be interpreted are therefore manifold and it is important to address the nuances between ‘ready-made’ and ‘to have had it made’ in order to more fully understand the implications for the embroidery trade. The main methodological issue with distinguishing between the two lies in the fact that the retailers and producers themselves did not make a distinction in their textual records. The trade cards of merchants who sold embroidered waistcoats, for example, refer to the products in their advertisements as simply ‘embroidered waistcoats’ (*vestes brodées*). The term ‘ready-made’ could therefore mean that the garment was either already made-up and bought from a second-hand clothes dealer, or that it was bought in the form of ‘ready-embroidered’ panels, which would be taken to a tailor after the point of purchase to be made into the garment according to the person’s measurements.

3.1 Selling Etiquette: The Court

The excessive consumption habits of the nobility and the codes of dress dictated by courtly etiquette at Versailles sustained the top end of the market for embroidery until the end of the *ancien régime*. For formal presentation at court, men were required to wear the *habit à la française* or the *habit habillé*, a three-piece suit which had to be heavily embroidered in silks, gold or silver. Women were required to don the lavishly-decorated *grand habit* (court dress).¹¹ Such rules of dress were not only the result of centuries of court etiquette dictated by successive monarchs, but were also in place to benefit the French economy. For this reason, military uniforms were not allowed at Versailles, so all male visitors were required to employ the services of French embroiderers and tailors.¹² Such

¹⁰ Beverly Lemire, ‘Developing Consumerism and the Ready-Made Clothing Trade in Britain 1750-1800’, *Textile History*, 15/1 (1984), 21-44; Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 1997), pp. 43-74.

¹¹ The intricacies of court dress and the role of embroidery on these garments are explained in Chapter 1.

¹² Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 111. For a useful overview of the magnificence of court dress dictated by codes of etiquette set by Louis XIV and perpetuated until 1789, see Philip

garments were extremely expensive and featured costly materials such as gold, silver and diamonds.¹³ The purchase of expensive embroidery for court dress was a time-intensive activity for both client and embroiderer: from the choosing of the design from illustrated paper designs and samples, to the production and delivery to client, shopping for embroidery at the higher end of the market was certainly a drawn-out experience.

The concept of shopping as a genteel leisure activity was in existence as early as the seventeenth century, with the late seventeenth century witnessing the birth of sumptuous Parisian shop interiors designed to entice the customer through their glittering shop windows and comfortable furniture.¹⁴ The trade card of Jean Magoulet, embroiderer to the late queen (*brodeur de la feue reine*), gives one impression of how shopping for embroidery in the late seventeenth century could be a sociable and pleasurable leisure activity (figure 3.2). Dated to around 1690, the printed image depicts the interior of Magoulet's shop with the image of a male and female customer each being attended by a shop assistant (presumably Magoulet himself and an apprentice). As Joan DeJean has noted, Magoulet made enterprising use of the latest innovations in shop design and display to make the shopping experience for his customers exciting and comfortable. He incorporated modern windows, as well as seating which according to DeJean, had been invented by Parisian cabinet-makers as recently as 1673.¹⁵ The customers foregrounded in the illustration further emphasise his noble clientele: they are clearly of high social standing, as can be discerned from their clothing and hairstyles. The male customer leans forward to inspect a waistcoat shape, not dissimilar from the one he is wearing; the customer is intently inspecting the garment and at the same time is feeling the material of the product.¹⁶ The female customer is perusing what appears to be either a paper

Mansell, *Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹³ See Chapter 1 for an examination of the types of embroidered clothing and their materials during the eighteenth century.

¹⁴ See Joan DeJean, 'Shops of Gold: Advertising Luxury in Seventeenth-Century Paris', *Luxury*, 1 (2014), 23-46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ Kate Smith argues that the sensory experience was integral to the eighteenth-century experience of shopping, and that physically handling items in shops was a key way in which men and women came to understand design and workmanship during this period. See Kate Smith, 'Sensing Design

embroidery design or an embroidery sample; at the same time the other shopkeeper encourages her to look at the waistcoat shape being shown to the male customer.

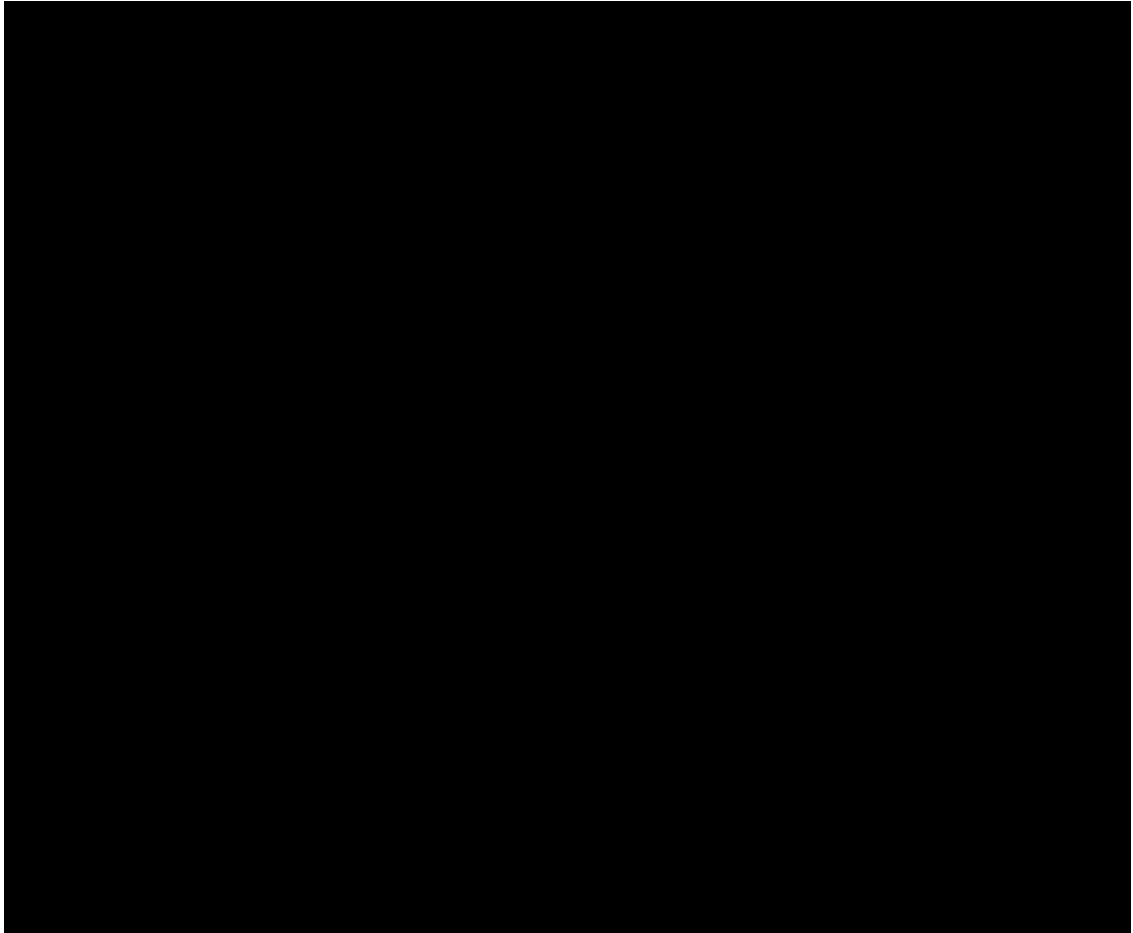


Figure 3.2. Trade card of Jean Magoulet, etching and engraving on paper, 25.5 × 21.4 cm, c. 1690. 3686.1.6.8. © Waddesdon Manor.

As Berg and Clifford have noted, many trade cards of the eighteenth century depicted customers ‘being “courted” by the shopkeeper’ and Magoulet’s trade card in particular has been singled out for his use of the ‘conversation piece’, an artistic convention, to signify his position as a high-status shopkeeper and appeal to the customer’s desire to partake in the pleasurable activity of shopping.¹⁷ Not only does

and Workmanship: The Haptic Skills of Shoppers in Eighteenth Century London’, *Journal of Design History*, 25/1 (2012), 1-10.

¹⁷ Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, ‘Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France’, *Cultural and Social History*, 4/2 (2007), 145-70 (p. 160 and p. 157). For an analysis of the ‘conversation piece’ as an artistic convention, see Kate Retford,

Magoulet's trade card belong to the wider print culture of the day, the visual conventions of which his clientele would be acutely aware, but it also signifies his belonging to a new world of elite retail. The shopping experience was one in which consumers took the time to discuss, explore, touch and evaluate the products, and where the relationship between the shopkeeper and customer was intensely personal.¹⁸ Capitalising on his role as embroiderer to the queen, Magoulet plays on his royal patronage as a key selling point of his products which are further enhanced by the prominent coat of arms and the sumptuous interior of the shop represented in the illustration. Furthermore, the variety of his products is displayed in the background and includes a rather large Order of the Holy Spirit, a chasuble and what appears to be a coverlet for a horse. Such products denote the high status of Magoulet's customers, for these products would have been expensive and bought only by those of a certain social standing (i.e. the court nobility or Church). They would not have been available for instant purchase, rather they would have been personalised to the customer's requirements. The accompanying text confirms that these products are embroidered in the expensive materials of gold, silver or silk.

Magoulet's trade card is indicative of the staple products found at the top end of the market for embroidery which catered to the rules of etiquette and tradition. Despite Magoulet's claim that his products were 'the most fashionable', his main business was court embroidery. These products continued to be sold well into the late eighteenth century and were not dramatically affected by changes in demand for fashionable novelties. Rather, the products displayed in Magoulet's trade card, particularly the waistcoat panel and Order of the Holy Spirit, were part of the enduring culture of consumption at the French court. The cross of the Order of the Holy Spirit is a case in

The Conversation Piece: Making Modern Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017). Retford's study analyses the conversation piece within the broader social and cultural context of Georgian Britain, arguing that the organisation of both interior and exterior space in conversation paintings is essential to our understanding of this sub-genre as reflective of the values of polite sociability. Moreover, the conversation piece is important for displaying the myriad social, commercial and familial networks that interrelated during this period. Magoulet's trade card is similarly reflective of such issues and foregrounds the commercial relationship between shopkeeper and customer within a sumptuous shop interior to emphasise the genteel connotations of shopping.

¹⁸ Natacha Coquery, 'The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Journal of Design History*, 17/1 (2004), 71-89 (p. 79).

point. Founded by Henry III in 1578, the Order of the Holy Spirit was the senior chivalric order in France until its subsequent abolition during the French Revolution and following its restoration under the Bourbon monarchy, again in 1830. All appointments to the Order were made by the King and were reserved for princes and the highest nobility. Those who were admitted were required to wear the cross of the order during ceremonial occasions at court. The cross was eight-pointed with four fleur-de-lys around the edge and a dove in the centre, and embroidered versions of the cross were worn on the left breast of a man's court suit (figure 3.3).¹⁹ Figure 3.4 is the 1662 trade card of Bries, a master embroiderer-vestment-maker (*maître brodeur-chasublier*) who, according to the card, 'makes all sorts of embroideries and sells crosses of the Order of the Holy Spirit'.²⁰ Operating prior to Magoulet, Bries ran an embroidery business on the prestigious rue Saint-Honoré and as his trade card suggests, specialised in the production and retail of embroidered crosses of the Order of the Holy Spirit. Since the cross was only worn by the most powerful members of the court who had been personally selected by the king, Bries evidently supplied the extremely wealthy and high-status nobility, further enhanced by the geographical location of his shop in the exclusive luxury shopping district of Paris.

¹⁹ The crosses could also be in jewelry form. The cross in figure 3.3 for example could either be an embroidered cross or a piece of jewelry, since its positioning does not appear to interfere with the gold embroidered edging of the suit.

²⁰ 'faict tovttes sortes de broderyes e vend des croix delordre dv st. esprit'. 3686.1.21.35.



Figure 3.3. Louis-Michel Van Loo, *Full-length Portrait of Louis XV (1710-1774), King of France*, c. 1760, oil on canvas, 76-000276, Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles.

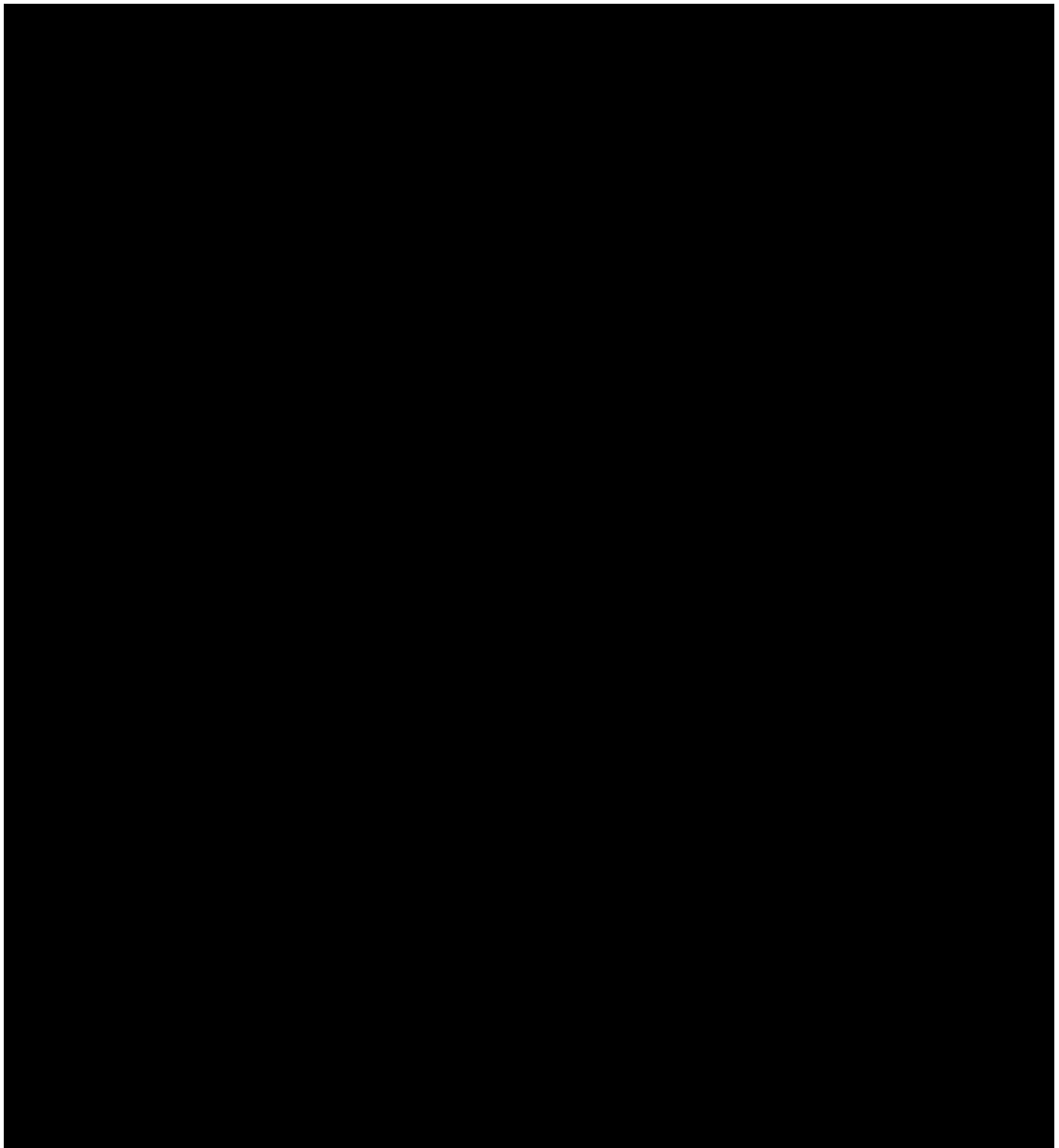


Figure 3.4. Trade card of Bries, engraving on paper, 29. 8 × 28 cm, 1662. 3686.1.21.35.

© Waddesdon Manor.

Professional embroiderers continued to produce and sell crosses of the various chivalric orders well into the late eighteenth century. For embroiderers to the king, such as Louis Jacques Balzac, these embroidered ceremonial crosses constituted a staple product of their business. A century after Bries and around 70 years after Magoulet, Balzac, like his predecessors, regularly supplied ceremonial crosses to the court which had changed little during this period of almost a century. His order book for the years 1760-62 details all of the embroidery commissions which he undertook during this three-year

period and shows that on average, Balzac sold 157 embroidered ceremonial crosses each year, of which around 126 were for the Order of the Holy Spirit. Other crosses that Balzac sold included those of the Order of Saint Louis, the Order of Saint Michael and the Order of Saint Januarius.²¹ Balzac produced crosses in a variety of materials, including diamonds, gold and silver. The prices ranged from 5 *livres* 10 *sols* for a small-sized cross, to 15 *livres* for a medium-sized cross, to 44 *livres* for a ‘large mantle cross in diamonds’.²² Production of crosses of the Order of the Holy Spirit in particular was strictly regulated by the Paris guild of embroiderers, with instructions that they should be ‘on a double lining of canvas and taffeta, & will be well & duly made, following the report of the elder *Jurés*’ written into their statutes.²³ Close regulation by the guild, whose statutes changed infrequently over the eighteenth century, suggests that such embroidery was not affected dramatically by changes in fashion.²⁴ Across this three-year period however, Balzac earned on average 1,585 *livres* from the crosses each year, so this product constituted under 5 percent of his average annual income from his embroidery commissions, yet they made up the majority of his monthly orders (table 3.1).²⁵

²¹ The Order of Saint Louis was founded by Louis XIV in 1693 and named after Louis IX; it was a chivalric order which recognised outstanding officers. The Order of Saint Michel was founded by Louis XI in 1469 and was the highest chivalric order in France until the Order of the Holy Spirit was created in 1578. The Order of Saint Janvier was founded in 1738 by Charles VII of Naples (later Charles III of Spain) and was a chivalric order to which only the highest nobility of Europe was admitted.

²² ‘une grande croix de manteau en Brillant’. ADP D5/B6/reg.699: ‘Louis Jacques Balzac, Registre des Livraisons d’Ouvrages Commencé le 1er Janvier 1760’, 25 June 1763, p. 4. The average annual income of an unskilled labourer was 200-300 *livres*, with the income for an artisan rising to 400 *livres*. The crosses were therefore expensive accessories. Income information taken from Jean Sgard, ‘L’Échelle des revenus’, *Dix-huitième siècle, au tournant des lumières: 1780-1820*, 14 (1982), 425-33 (p. 426).

²³ ‘sur double toile & taffetas, & seront bien & duement faites, suivant le rapport des anciens Jurés’. Article 34, *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris, 1718* (Paris: Impr. De Valleyre, 1758).

²⁴ For an examination of the statutes of the Paris guild of embroiderers, see Chapter 4.

²⁵ ADP D5/B6/reg.699.

| | 1760 | 1761 | 1762 | TOTAL |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Ceremonial Crosses (All) | 1,652 | 1,993 | 1,111 | 4,756 |
| Male Clothing | 47,776 | 28,647 | 19,489 | 95,912 |
| Female Clothing | 7,540 | 0 | 0 | 7,540 |
| Other | 1,911 | 532 | 2,184 | 4,627 |
| TOTAL | 58,879 | 31,172 | 22,784 | 112,835 |

Table 3.1. Annual earnings in *livres* of Balzac by product category, 1760-62. Source:
ADP D5/B6/reg.699.

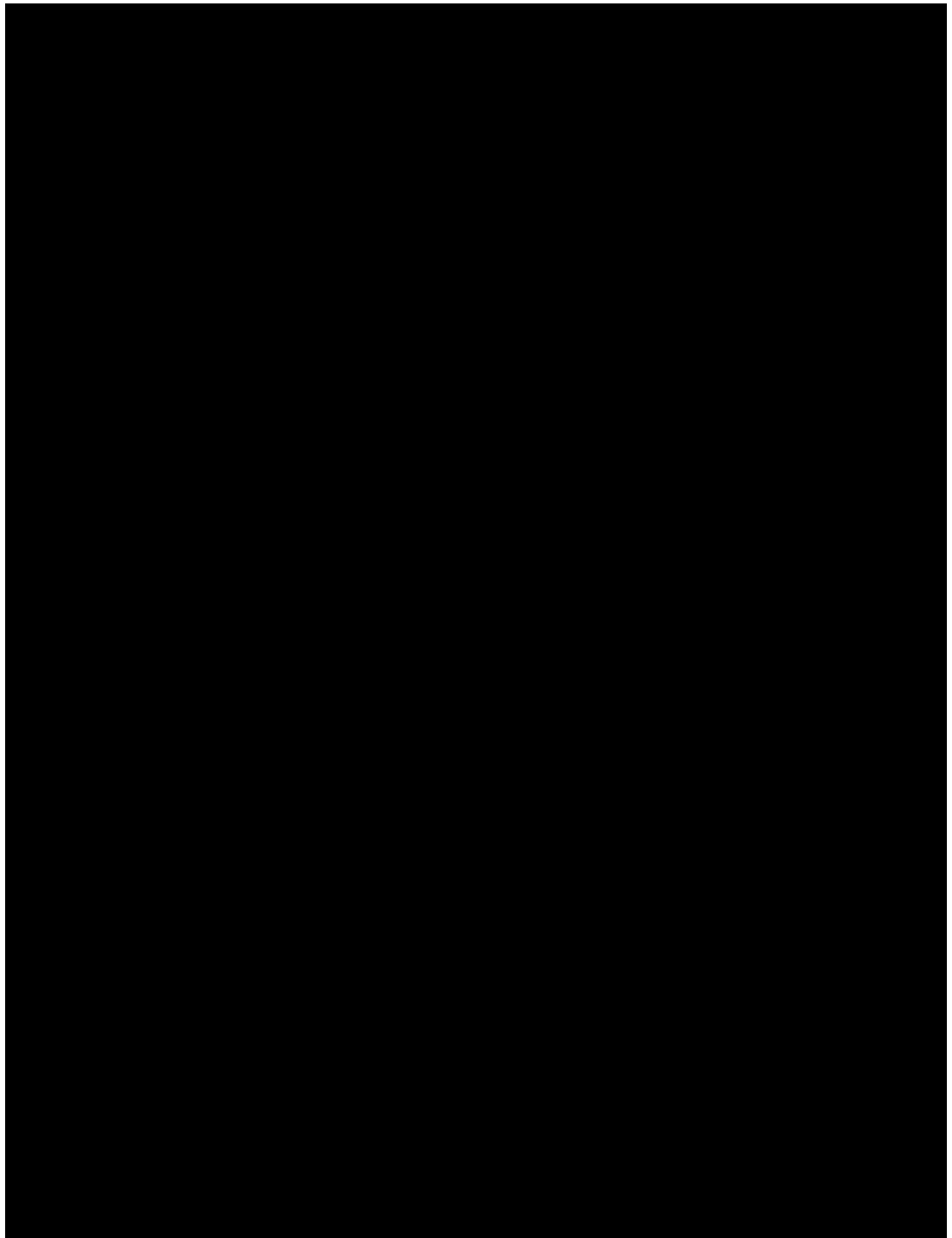


Figure 3.5a. Court suit, silk embroidery on velvet, France, 1774-93. 32.40a-c. © 2000–
2018 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

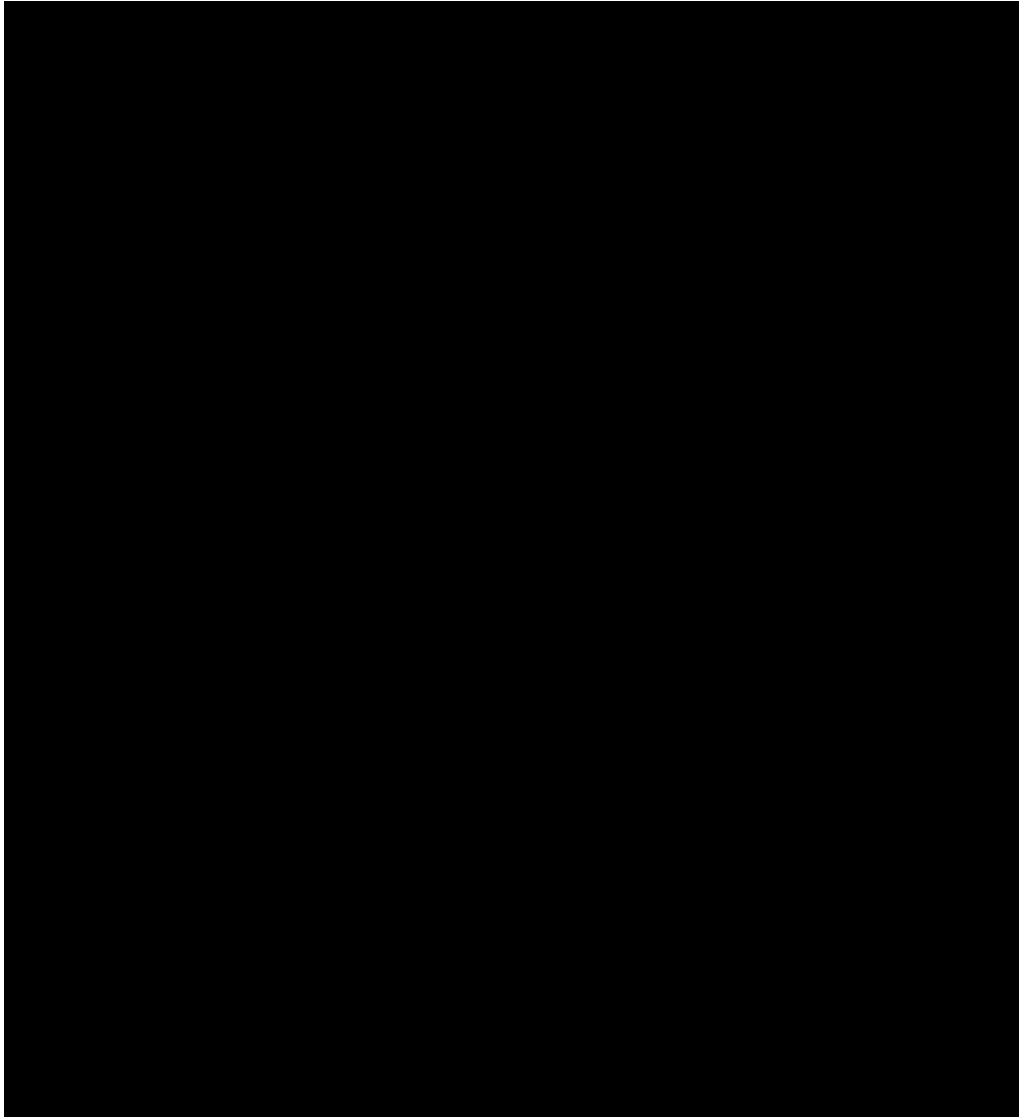


Figure 3.5b. Detail of court suit, France. 1774-93. 32.40a-c. © 2000–2018 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The suit in figures 3.5a and 3.5b shows the type of court coat (though ten years later in date) which one of Balzac's ceremonial crosses may have adorned during an appearance at Versailles. The stitched outline of a star/cross on the left breast of the suit, possibly that of the Order of the Holy Spirit, suggests that the wearer of this suit almost certainly wore this suit and the now-absent cross during a presentation to the king at Versailles, or attending a foreign court such as Madrid, having been the recipient of a

chivalric order.²⁶ Indeed, court suits such as this – rather than its missing cross – constituted the most significant portion of Balzac’s income in the 1760s. An analysis of the same order book reveals that commissions for embroidered male garments constituted around 85 percent of Balzac’s annual income and his clientele comprised the European elite: many of Balzac’s commissions were destined for the king and the dauphin. Not counting the royal wardrobe, then, Balzac delivered to clients such as the marquis de Ximénès (received by a M. Mahomy), the ambassador to Spain, and a mercer M. Boucher de St Martin who supplied the Spanish court.²⁷ He also produced embroidery for the king’s painters (*peintres du roi*) (e.g. M. Jacques), who were required to appear in the necessarily-elaborate garments of Versailles when presenting their work.

On average, Balzac delivered around 44 of these commissions each year, that is around three to four per month. As Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell has noted in her study of dress at the court of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, ‘etiquette demanded the purchase of entirely new clothes.’²⁸ Indeed, the majority of Balzac’s commissions were for complete suits in different varieties of silk, including velvet, which were richly embroidered in expensive materials such as gold, silver and diamonds. It can be concluded that these suits were the *habit à la française*, required for presentation at court. For men, presentation at court necessitated the purchase of at least two new suits: the *habit à la française* for the presentation ceremony itself, and a suit in which he could join the royal hunt the day after his presentation. The latter consisted of a grey suit and breeches with a red waistcoat. An example found in Balzac’s order book demonstrates the expense that such etiquette demanded. On 28 March 1760, Balzac delivered to a client three complete suits at a total price of 3,550 *livres*. The first is described as being ‘a suit of lilac wool, embroidered [with] diamonds and Paris silver [...] in an extremely rich new

²⁶ *Visitors to Versailles (1682-1789)* exhibition, 16 April-29 July 2018, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From 1700 onwards, the Bourbon court in Madrid followed French fashions so it is feasible that this outfit could also have been worn at a court other than Versailles. See also the exhibition catalogue: Danielle Kisluk-Grosheide and Bertrand Rondot, *Visiteurs de Versailles: Voyageurs, Princes, Ambassadeurs 1682-1789* (Paris: Gallimard/Château de Versailles, 2018).

²⁷ The Marquis de Ximénès (1726-1817) was a French poet and playwright, penning several tragedies over the course of his lifetime which did not meet with great success. The French ambassador to Spain at this time was Pierre-Paul, marquis d’Ossun (1713-88). I am grateful to Lesley E. Miller for the reference concerning M. Boucher de St Martin.

²⁸ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 74.

design for the price of fifteen hundred *livres*’; the second, ‘a wine-coloured wool suit [richly] embroidered in [diamonds and Paris gold]’ for the price of eight hundred *livres*. The final item in the same order was a ‘grey wool suit embroidered along all the seams [in diamonds and Paris gold], and the crimson satin waistcoat, embroidered in Paris gold, all treated very richly, for the price of twelve hundred and fifty *livres*’.²⁹ For those appearing at court, it was essential that they were presented in new clothes and it was extremely poor form to wear the same outfit twice.³⁰ The first suit in a ‘new design’ was thus of extreme importance for the wearer to conform to strict codes of etiquette at Versailles. The latter suit could conceivably be the uniform required of those attending the royal hunt the day after their presentation at court. After their presentations, having been accepted as a courtier, such gentlemen were subsequently allowed to attend receptions in half-gala dress with embroidered edges, or in full-gala dress, richly embroidered all over.³¹

Court dress was not, however, immune to the influences of fashion and it was necessary for court embroiderers such as Magoulet and Balzac to adapt in order to supply both court and fashion markets. Despite practising the business of embroidery 70 years apart, both Magoulet and Balzac actively advertised their services through the use of trade cards, demonstrating a conscious decision on their part to seek out further business opportunities within, and possibly outside of, the courtly domain. Produced by professional artists or engravers, trade cards and bill heads constituted a relatively expensive investment. The decision to have a trade card or bill head produced to advertise one’s services or products was a well-thought through marketing strategy.³² Not only were trade cards used as active selling tools, but they were also used in wrapping items and

²⁹ ‘un habit de Drap lilas, brodé entrails et Brillants argent de Paris [...] d’un dessein nouveau extrêmement Riche, du prix de quinze cent livres’; ‘un habit de Drap couleur de vin Brodé entrails et Brillant or de Paris et traité tres Richement du prix de huit cent livres’; ‘un habit de drap gris Brodé sur toutes les coutures en traits et Brillants or de Paris, et la veste de satin cromoisie, Brodée en or de Paris, le tout traité très Richement, du prix de douze cent cinquante livres’. ADP D5/B6/reg.699, p. 6.

³⁰ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 76-7; p. 94.

³¹ Madeleine Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 92.

³² Berg and Clifford, ‘Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France’, p. 149.

acted as reminders to the customer, possibly encouraging repeat business.³³ Just as Magoulet's trade card played on his royal patronage to attract potential clients, so too did Balzac employ contemporary stylistic devices in his trade card to appeal to an external clientele (figure 3.6). Although the example we have is unfinished and does not feature any text, we can see that the cartouche adheres to the style conventions of the period: highly stylised with swags, bows, tassels, garlands of flowers and classical pillars, Balzac's trade card would have been instantly recognisable to the discerning consumer of fashionable, luxury goods. Furthermore, court embroiderers also advertised their services through print publications such as almanacs and guide books from as early as the 1690s. In Nicolas de Blégny's *Le livre commode des adresses de Paris pour 1692* for example, readers learned where to find embroiderers who worked for the court, including L'Hermineau, embroiderer to the king whose shop was at the Palais Royal, Messieurs de la Croix at the rue Neuve Saint-Martin, and the 'renowned embroiderer' Quenain of the rue d'Enfer.³⁴ Blégny's publication was intended to provide a useful guide to Paris for foreign visitors to the city and tellingly, there was an emphasis on information pertaining to shopping and luxury retailers. The reader was therefore encouraged to frequent the most fashionable shopping districts in Paris, where many of the court embroiderers were situated.³⁵ It was thus necessary that the professional embroiderers of eighteenth-century France could adapt to a clientele who needed to maintain a strict code of visual etiquette on the one hand, and the desire to follow the fast-paced fashions of the capital on the other.

³³ Ibid., pp. 150-51; DeJean, 'Shops of Gold: Advertising Luxury in Seventeenth-Century Paris', p. 37.

³⁴ 'fameux brodeur'. Nicolas de Blégny, *Le livre commode des adresses de Paris pour 1692 par Abraham du Pradel (Nicolas de Blégny); suivi d'appendices précédé d'une introduction, et annoté par Édouard Fournier* (Paris: Paul Daffis, 1692), p. 62.

³⁵ DeJean, 'Shops of Gold: Advertising Luxury in Seventeenth-Century Paris', pp. 36-7.



Figure 3.6. Trade card for Balzac, etching on paper, 8.4×10.6 cm, c. 1760.

3686.2.38.97. © Waddesdon Manor.

3.2 Selling Fashion: Paris

Directly commissioning embroidery from a professional embroiderer was not the only channel through which embroidery was sold and bought, and this was even more the case by the mid-eighteenth century. The *marchands merciers* of Paris also constituted an important distribution channel for professionally-embroidered products. They were major players in the luxury markets of eighteenth-century Paris and were famed for being ‘makers of nothing, sellers of everything’.³⁶ They operated almost exclusively in the domain of retailing rather than manufacture, and Carolyn Sargentson has demonstrated the extent to which they were able to manipulate the fashion and luxury markets through their innovative use of marketing, specialisation and the networks which they formed

³⁶ Savary des Bruslons (1723), quoted in Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands-Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum in association with the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996), p. 8.

with producers and designers.³⁷ Their prowess in marketing and forming strategic networks with suppliers and customers enabled them to have significant powers in the market, and Sargentson has argued that this contributed to their ability to manipulate the fashion markets of eighteenth-century Paris.³⁸ As sellers of fashionable, luxury goods, the *marchands merciers* had a major role in the marketing of embroidery as a fashionable product and in shifting the focus away from its association with tradition and etiquette, although courtly association was still important currency for advertising their goods. As we will see, the customers who purchased ceremonial crosses and court clothing from Balzac and others were the same customers who shopped in the fashionable shopping districts of the city for the novelties and frivolous luxury and semi-luxury items sold in the shops of the *marchands merciers* and *marchands de modes* of the rue Saint-Honoré and the Palais Royal. Indeed, Magoulet's insistence on the fashionability of his products indicates that the complicated relationship between fashion and court etiquette had endured since at least the seventeenth century. This tension, between purchasing goods out of social duty of rank and shopping for fashion for its own sake, can be most acutely seen through the retailing of embroidery in Paris.

In Paris, particularly during the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a number of shops within close proximity to and along the fashionable rue Saint-Honoré which advertised the fact that they sold 'embroideries' (*broderies*). These products were usually advertised as being of high-quality and expensive materials such as silk, silver and gold. Such shops would have attracted an aristocratic clientele and sold their products to courtiers. Among the private papers of the Comtesse d'Artois for example, is a variety of trade cards and bill heads for many of these luxury shopping boutiques run by the *marchands merciers* and *marchands de modes* of Paris. Married to the grandson of King Louis XV, Marie-Thérèse de Savoie, Comtesse d'Artois (figure 3.7) resided at Versailles and was a regular consumer of luxury goods. Her personal papers indicate that she counted Rose Bertin among her personal dressmakers, a clear marker of her elite status and place in

³⁷ See Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*; Sargentson, 'The Manufacture and Marketing of Luxury Goods: the *Marchands Merciers* of Late 17th- and 18th-Century Paris', in *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce*, ed. by Robert Fox and Anthony Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 99-137.

³⁸ See for example Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*.

Marie Antoinette's fashionable circle.³⁹ Whilst the Comtesse would almost certainly have commissioned expensive court clothing in order to adhere to the strict rules of etiquette and tradition, the trade cards testify to the fact that she purchased a range of fashionable goods that were not of this category.

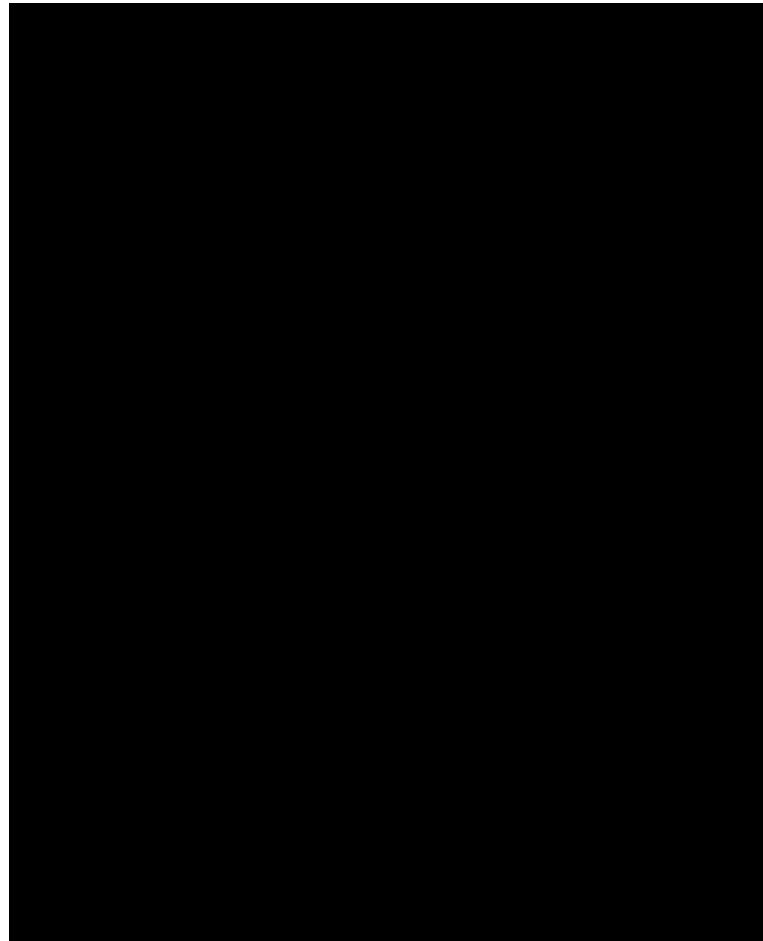


Figure 3.7. François-Hubert Drouais, *Marie-Thérèse de Savoie (1756-1805) Comtesse d'Artois*, 1775, oil on canvas, 98.5 × 78 cm. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Christophe Fouin.

³⁹ Rose Bertin (1747-1813) was a successful Parisian *marchande de modes* and personal dress maker to Queen Marie Antoinette. Her shop in the rue Saint-Honoré, *Le Grand Mogol*, supplied the female elite of Paris. She has been widely credited with creating the leading fashions worn by Marie Antoinette and her circle during the late eighteenth century. For the literature on Bertin, see for example: Chrisman-Campbell, 'Minister of Fashion: Marie-Jeanne 'Rose' Bertin, 1747-1813' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2002); Clare Haru Crowston, 'Women and the Multiple Meanings of Credit: The Financial Records of the Fashion Merchant, Rose Bertin', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 28 (2002), 335-44; Michelle Saporì, *Rose Bertin: couturière de Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Perrin, 2010).

The trade cards for *A La Perle*, *Au Temple du Goût*, *A L'Union des Arts* and *Au Soleil d'Or* (figures 3.8-3.11) can all be dated to the late 1770s and 1780s. All four shopkeepers advertised the fact that they sold embroidery. The presence of other products in the text of the trade cards such as 'gold braiding' (*galons d'or*), 'buttons' (*boutons*), 'flowers' (*fleurs*) and 'ribbons' (*rubans*) etc., indicate that the embroidery being sold in these shops was likely to have been in the form of ready-made accessories which could be added to an outfit. Indeed, *Au Temple du Goût* is advertised as a 'fashion shop' (*magasin de modes*). As a fashion merchant, Battallier would have been in the business of finishing and styling outfits for aristocratic customers, rather than producing the embroidery on site. Trade cards from this period went hand-in-hand with the popularity of the modern taste or the *goût moderne* that we now identify by the label 'rococo'. The style of their cartouche was quite often standardised, with similar frames or templates being offered by engravers from which individual shopkeepers could then choose, personalising their trade card with motifs and illustrations appropriate to their business.⁴⁰ In this way, whilst still adhering to a recognised form, embroiderers and embroidery merchants were able to convey a sense of individualism through the trade card. Although they vary in style and motif, the frames of each trade card are highly stylised and most feature the most fashionable motifs of the time, such as swags, bows, garlands of flowers and classical pillars, similar to that of Balzac.⁴¹ Moreover, the language used in these trade cards was designed not merely to inform customers of information such as product availability and price, but rather to persuade them to buy. The extensive listing of the products for sale in the trade cards of shops which sold embroidery in its various forms conveys the sense of the proliferation of new consumer goods which were becoming widely available throughout the period. The persuasive tactics of those who sold luxury items during the eighteenth century rested heavily on the notions of quality, variety and novelty. The juxtaposition of text and image which the trade card afforded was the ideal way for shopkeepers and artisans to express

⁴⁰ Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France', p. 149.

⁴¹ See for example Chapter 2.

how their products conformed to these notions, or to borrow Coquery's term, the trade card offered a 'double seduction'.⁴²

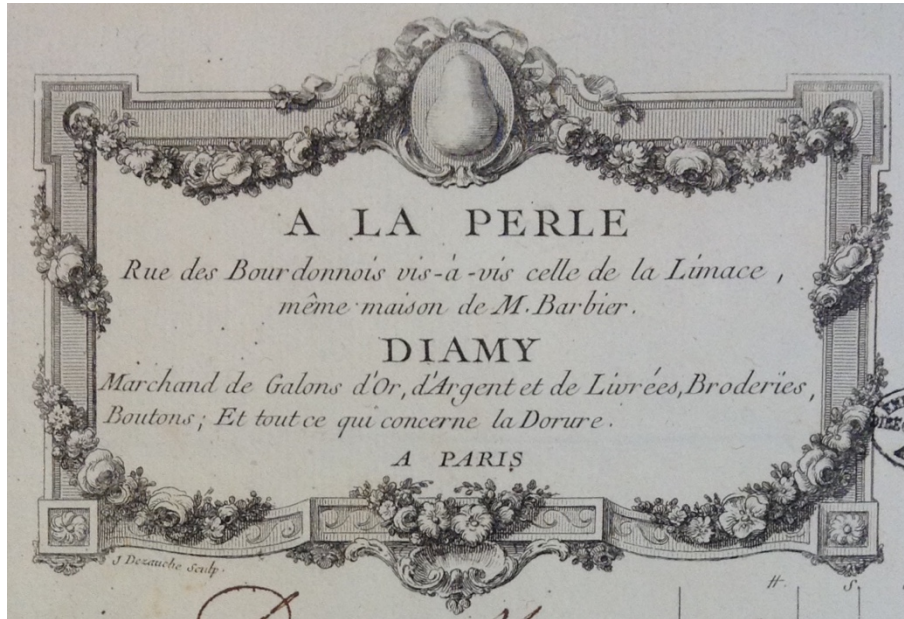


Figure 3.8. Bill head for *A La Perle*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 15 × 12 cm, 1784. AN T 433.



Figure 3.9. Bill head for *Au Temple du Goût*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 12 × 12 cm, 1787. AN T 433.

⁴² Coquery, 'The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', p. 76.



Figure 3.10. Bill head for *A L'Union des Arts*, etching and engraving on paper, approx.

12 × 9 cm, 1784. AN T 434.

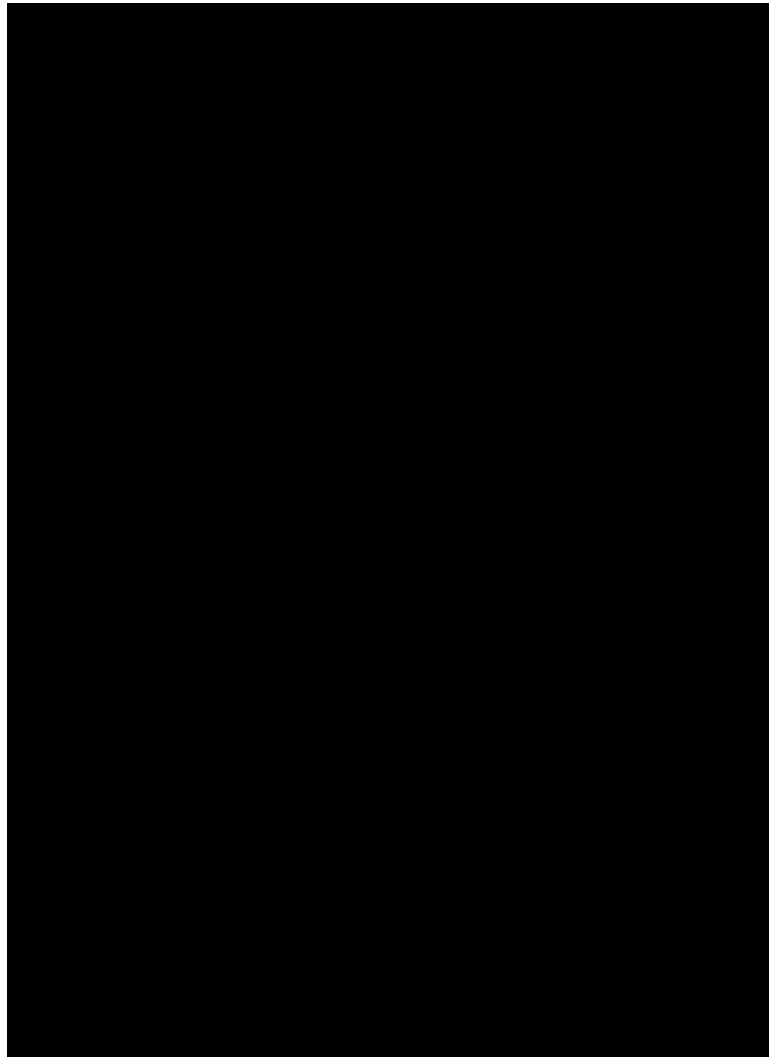


Figure 3.11. Bill head for *Au Soleil d'Or*, etching and engraving on paper, 23.9 × 17.9

cm, 1779. 3686.3.20.51. © Waddesdon Manor.

A common marketing strategy in the luxury trades was to emphasise royal patronage or the shopkeeper's courtly clientele, a phenomenon which continued well into the late eighteenth century. In her study of the marketing of semi-luxury goods in eighteenth-century Paris, Coquery suggests that due to the strong influence of the court on the Parisian luxury and fashion markets, shopkeepers 'knowingly exploited the rule of distinction borne by their clients and invented novelties and launched fashions capable of enticing them.'⁴³ This exploitation of distinction can be seen in the trade cards of *Chaine et Compagnie* and *Beaulard*, both of whom sold embroidery during the 1770s and promoted their close links to the court through their advertising. The trade card of *Chaine et Compagnie* (figure 3.13), a *marchand mercier*, explicitly promotes him as being 'merchant to the Queen' (*Md. de La Reine*) and his commercial links to the court are enhanced by the very title of the shop, *Aux deux princesses*, his location in the rue Comtesse d'Artois, his proclamation that he is able to carry out commissions for foreign courts, and the illustration of the two princesses.⁴⁴ The card is dated to 1775 and it was around this time that the new Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, began to assert her position at Versailles as a leader of fashion through her employment of various Parisian fashion merchants.⁴⁵ *Beaulard*, a fashion merchant who ran the shop *A La Protectrice des Arts* (figure 3.12) in the rue Saint-Honoré and who was a rival of *Bertin*,⁴⁶ similarly asserts his proximity to the fashionable queen of France. With a portrait of his royal patron and entitling himself 'fashion merchant to the queen' (*Md. de Modes de la Reine*), *Beaulard's* 'selection of embroideries in gold, silver and silk' (*assortiments de Broderies en Or Argent et Soye*) would have been bought by clients eager to keep up with the fast-paced fashions of Louis XVI's court.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴⁴ The detailed curatorial commentary by Waddesdon Manor curator Phillippa Plock suggests that the two women in the illustration are the Comtesse d'Artois and the Princesse de Lamballe. See < <https://waddesdon.org.uk/the-collection/item/?id=15118> > [last accessed 22 April 2019].

⁴⁵ Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette wore to the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), pp. 101-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

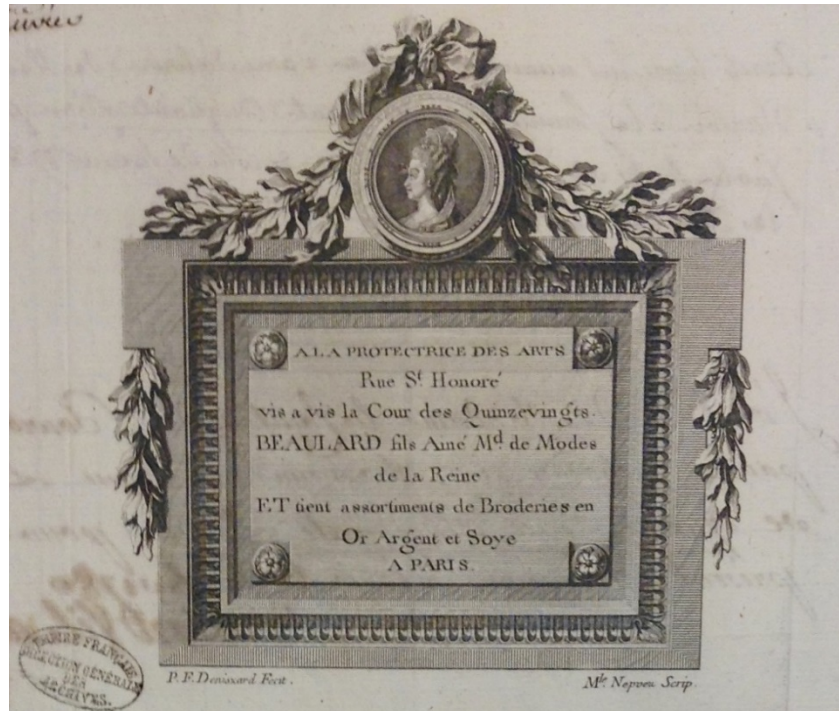


Figure 3.12. Bill head for *A La Protectrice des Arts*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 16 × 14 cm, 1777. AN T 265/4.

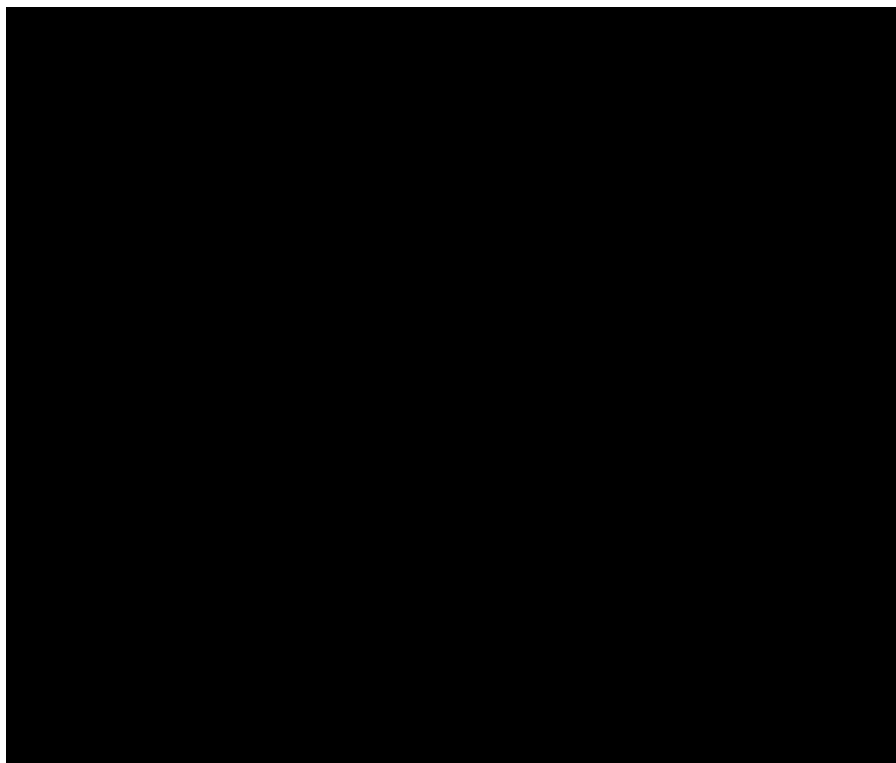


Figure 3.13. Trade card for Chaine & Compagnie, etching and engraving on paper, 14.8 × 19 cm, c. 1775. 3686.2.17.41. © Waddesdon Manor.

Nevertheless, from these trade cards and bill heads alone it is not immediately clear what exactly these embroideries (*broderies*) were that were being bought by aristocratic clients. Given the varied ways in which they were advertised, they could have been embroidered accessories, furnishings or clothing. The business papers of the Boursier brothers, Parisian *marchands merciers*, clarify this matter somewhat.⁴⁷ An analysis of their business agreement and stock inventory for the year 1773 reveals that embroidered clothing, such as the court suits produced by professional embroiderers like Balzac, could be bought in its 'ready-made' form from *marchands merciers* who specialised in luxury clothing and accessories. In 1773, Antoine-Claude and Alexandre Boursier, both *marchands merciers*, inherited a gold and silver embroidery business from their parents. The business was passed on to them on the occasion of Antoine-Claude's marriage on the premise that the brothers would form a partnership and continue the family business. The business in the rue de Roule, which was located in close proximity to the fashionable shopping district around the rue Saint-Honoré, consisted of a shop which occupied the ground floor, the whole of the second floor, a room at the front on the third floor, as well as a room at the back of the third floor, the whole of the front section of the fourth floor, a maid's room on the fifth floor, as well as a cellar.⁴⁸ The total price of stock held at the time of the contract amounted to 200,000 *livres*. The Boursier brothers' merchandise included gold braiding for various uses, gold and silver embroidered buttons, and gold and silver thread ready for use in works of embroidery.⁴⁹ They also sold a range of military and uniform accessories such as gold and silver epaulettes, frogging in gold, silver and silk, crests with gold fringing, garters and livery braids.

In particular, they sold a range of embroideries which in the inventory of stock are listed as embroidered suits in gold, silver, gold and silver, and silver and colour (probably coloured silks). In the absence of specific references to the physical form of the embroidered suits, it is here that we begin to see the problems that the term 'ready-made' has in the context of embroidery. In reading 'embroidered suit', it is immediately assumed that they stocked made-up suits. However, surviving object sources indicate that such suits were sold in the form of ready-embroidered suit lengths, which would be

⁴⁷ AN MC/ET/XXVII/360: 'Société entre Antoine-Claude et Alexandre Boursier, frères, marchands merciers [...] pour l'exploitation du fonds de commerce de broderies d'or et d'argent', 5 juillet 1772.

⁴⁸ There is no mention of the first floor in the contract.

⁴⁹ AN MC/ET/XXVII/360.

assembled by a tailor after purchase. Many of the embroidered suit lengths sold by the Boursier brothers were indicated as being visually spectacular, as many were embroidered with spangles (*paillettes*). They stocked eight suits embroidered in gold, ranging in price from 210 *livres* to 1,286 *livres*, which were worth a total of 5,177 *livres* 14 *sols*. The four suits embroidered in gold and silver which they stored were worth a total of 3,550 *livres* 10 *sols*, the one suit embroidered in silver and coloured silks was worth 789 *livres* 12 *sols*, and the four suits embroidered in silver were worth a total of 2,297 *livres* 14 *sols*. In addition to suits, the following were listed under ‘silver embroideries’ (*broderies d’argent*): four fleur de lys embroidered in silver spangles with two sprays in gold and silver (7 *livres* 16 *sols*); three small crosses of the Order of the Holy Spirit embroidered in spangles and diamonds at 8 *livres* each; one large cross of the Order of the Holy Spirit embroidered in spangles and diamonds (20 *livres*); along with various lengths of embroidery in spangles, gold and silver.⁵⁰ Finally, the last item on the inventory is stated as: ‘For the total bill of Madame la Comtesse d’Artois, 4,901 *livres* 8 *sols* 1 *denier*’, confirming the aristocratic clientele of the Boursier brothers.⁵¹ Furthermore, the expensive nature of the suits and the presence of the crosses of the Order of the Holy Spirit indicate that the Boursier brothers supplied a similar clientele to that of Balzac and other court embroiderers. Why, then, did such consumers buy their embroidery from two different retail outlets? If they were able to go directly to an embroiderer, why buy similar products from a merchant, who essentially acted as a distributor for the professional embroiderers?

There are several possible reasons why customers might have sought out products in a shop rather than directly from an embroiderer. Firstly, it could be suggested that pricing was an important factor in explaining such consumer behaviour. The prices of the *marchands merciers* were certainly competitive: at 8 *livres* and 20 *livres* respectively, the small and larger crosses sold by the Boursiers were the same, if not slightly cheaper than those sold by Balzac. The suits in their stock, although not cheap, were also less expensive than those embroidered by Balzac. Secondly, such shopkeepers provided aristocratic consumers with a wide range of products, some of which were separate and distinct from the clothing required by Versailles etiquette. The availability to customers of a range of embroidered products in one visit to a shop would also have been more convenient as customers were able to obtain fashionable and expensive embroidery without having to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ ‘Pour le montant du memoire de Madame la Comtesse d’Artois, 4901 *livres* 8 *sols* 1 *denier*’, *ibid.*

engage in a lengthy commissioning process with an individual embroiderer. This convenience would have been particularly attractive to foreign visitors to Paris. It was common for tourists to stop in Paris on their way to Versailles, where they were required to conform to the sartorial etiquette of the court. *Marchands merciers* such as the Boursier brothers were on hand to supply visitors with the clothing that they required without having to employ the services of an embroiderer, a process which otherwise would have entailed considerable foresight and long-distance negotiation. Purchasing ready-embroidered suits from the *marchands merciers* was thus highly convenient for non-local customers. Finally, we know that the *marchands merciers* engaged well with long-distance selling, evidenced by the example of the Barbiers, father and son Paris silk merchants whose correspondence indicates that they regularly sold their products via the postal service.⁵² It is therefore conceivable that the *marchands merciers* stocked a range of ready-embroidered products to sell to their customers who were not local. The following section will examine how *marchands merciers* sold embroidery from Lyon via their shops.

3.3 Lyon Imports

The range of ready-embroidered products stocked by *marchands merciers* included embroidery from Lyon. The Parisian *marchands merciers* constituted a major distribution channel for Lyon-produced embroidery and some even incorporated the Lyon-provenance of these products into their marketing strategy. The trade card of Madame Auboineau (figure 3.14) for example, advertised that her shop at the Palais Royal stocked ‘all sorts of waistcoats from Lyon’.⁵³ The emphasis in her trade card was on both variety and the latest taste, signalling that Lyonnais products were highly fashionable. By 1786, the *Cabinet des modes* had also recognised the fashionability of Lyonnais embroidered waistcoats in particular, noting that ‘Almost all of these Waistcoats [at the Palais Royal] come from the Manufactories of Lyon’.⁵⁴ Yet Lyon-based embroidery and silk merchants had been sending their waistcoats to Paris for over a decade when the *Cabinet des modes* made its announcement. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Parisian *marchands merciers* were ordering embroidered waistcoats from Lyon at least as early as 1770. The Lyonnais

⁵² Mary Schoeser Boyce, ‘The Barbier Manuscripts’, *Textile History*, 12/1 (1981), 37-58; Miller, *Selling Silks*, p. 28.

⁵³ ‘toutes sortes de Vestes de Lyon’. ADP D43Z/1.

⁵⁴ ‘Presque tous ces Gilets viennent des Manufactures de Lyon.’ *Cabinet des modes*, p. 110.

silk merchant-manufacturer Fiard, for example, supplied Parisian *marchands merciers* who had shops in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the Louvre with embroidered waistcoats throughout the 1770s.⁵⁵ It was thus the visibility of Lyon embroidery which came to the fore in the last decades of the eighteenth century, rather than a significant change in the product itself. The new promotion of Lyon embroidery seems to suggest an intentional strategy on the part of merchants to distinguish their products from the embroidered formal court suits which the *Cabinet des modes* denounced in 1786. The *marchands merciers* of Paris were thus able to meet a consumer desire for fashion and did so by repackaging embroidery so that it lost its associations with ostentatious, heavy and traditional court clothing.



Figure 3.14. Trade card for Madame Auboineau, etching and engraving on paper
approx. 10 × 8 cm, c. 1780s. ADP D43Z/1.

One of the main ways in which both the *marchands merciers* and the fashion press repackaged embroidery as a fashionable item not associated with court formality in the 1780s was thus through an emphasis on Lyon embroidery. In the late eighteenth century, embroidery from Lyon became much more visible in the commercial fashion press, suggesting that it was a popular luxury item among elite customers throughout France

⁵⁵ ADR 8 B 876/1: 'Correspondance reçue de Paris'.

and Europe.⁵⁶ It was considered the height of fashion and as the previous chapter demonstrated, Parisian merchants actively commissioned embroidery from Lyon for their high-class customers who sought embroidery which was both tasteful and reasonably-priced.

In 1778 for example, Joseph Pascal, a Lyon-based embroidery merchant, sent a package of assorted embroidered waistcoats for his nephew to sell in Paris. These were described as white embroidered *gros de Naples*, a type of plain-woven and durable silk, and were to be sent as shapes, ready to be made up.⁵⁷ Pascal relied on two Paris-based agents for his sales in Paris – his nephew, Claude Pascal, and Martin Fils, a young merchant. Claude had moved to Paris in 1764 where he found a job as a clerk for Monsieur Royer, a cloth merchant on the prestigious rue Saint-Honoré. Although his ambition was to work in finance, Claude took the job with Royer, vowing to make the most of the opportunity which would allow him to ‘get to know the business of fabric, which will be advantageous to us one day.’⁵⁸ And indeed Claude was right, for his new job enabled him to make strategic business contacts and regularly encouraged Pascal to send him samples that he could show to his contacts which would enable Pascal to sell his products in Paris. Claude wrote to his uncle regularly during this period requesting him to send embroidered waistcoats which he could sell on via the glamorous shops along the rue Saint-Honoré and at the Palais Royal. In particular, Claude kept Pascal informed of the competitive prices of the embroidered waistcoats on sale at the Palais-Royal, noting that in some shops they were being sold for between 20 and 25 *livres*. This was indeed cheap for an embroidered product. Order books for Parisian embroiderers to the court, such as Balzac, suggest that in some cases, an embroidered waistcoat could fetch up to 640 *livres*.⁵⁹

The correspondence between Paris and Lyon, as well as the order books of Lyonnais embroidery merchants, indicate that there was a type of embroidery from Lyon which was being retailed at a significantly lower price than the elaborately embroidered court clothing produced by Parisian embroiderers such as Balzac. In Lyon and away from

⁵⁶ The fragmentary nature of the sources for the earlier part of the period that this thesis covers means it is not possible to say definitively that embroidery from Lyon was not as popular in the first half of the century.

⁵⁷ ADR 8 B 1089/8: ‘Journal d’achats 1er juin 1728-79’, 30 March 1778.

⁵⁸ ‘connaître l’étoffe ce qui pourra nous être avantageux un jour’. ADR 8 B 1089/1, ‘Claude Pascal to Joseph Pascal, Paris’, 17 April 1764.

⁵⁹ ADP D5/B6/reg. 699, p. 8.

the constraints of the guild regulations of Paris, some Lyonnais manufacturers and merchants were capitalising on this new trend for the embroidered waistcoat. As a 'free trade', embroidery was not regulated by a guild in Lyon, meaning that professional embroiderers were able to exercise more autonomy over the production process than their Parisian counterparts and had the flexibility to combine a variety of cheaper materials and experiment with novel techniques in order to keep costs down.⁶⁰ In order to meet consumer demand for embroidered products which were both reasonably-priced and in the latest fashion or good taste, Pascal and other Lyonnais embroidery merchants began trading in tambour embroidery. As explained in the previous chapters, the tambour technique enabled embroiderers to execute designs in chain stitch with precision, and with greater speed and efficiency. Tambour work was faster to execute than many other methods of stitching, and it was possible to execute exquisite designs on clothing with a high level of depth and subtlety in a shorter length of time – exactly the type of embroidery which constituted the 'good taste' which consumers desired and of which fashion periodicals such as the *Cabinet des modes* promoted.⁶¹

Pascal's account books show that for waistcoats in tamboured embroidery, he was working on a lead time of approximately one month between the order date and delivery to the client. For example, on 20 May 1778 he took an order from one client for 28 tamboured waistcoats and one tamboured frock, all to be delivered approximately five weeks later on 28 June 1778.⁶² This was a much faster turnaround than embroidery produced via other techniques. The order books for Parisian embroiderers who supplied members of the court during this period show that for court suits and waistcoats with embroidery in gold, silver or silk, the turnaround time was approximately three months. The difference in turnaround times suggests that Lyon merchants were producing 'separates' rather than complete suits, and that Pascal likely subcontracted the work to several embroiderers in order to fulfil the order in a short space of time. This in itself indicates the degree of flexibility that Lyon embroidery merchants had in meeting a varied consumer demand for embroidery. Waistcoats with tambour embroidery were also at the cheaper end of the pricing scale. An account book for another Lyon-based embroidery

⁶⁰ The guild-regulated trade in Paris and the non-guild regulated trade in Lyon are compared and analysed in Chapters 4 and 5.

⁶¹ See also Chapter 2.

⁶² ADR 8 B 1089/12: 'Livre des commissions', 20 May 1778.

merchant, Villoud, Cadet et Cie, show that he sold tamboured waistcoats for between 7 *livres* and 14 *livres*.⁶³

Furthermore, many of these waistcoats were *gilets*, which were shorter than the skirted *vestes* more commonly worn at court. With less expanse of material, these waistcoats took a shorter amount of time to embroider and cost less than the longer waistcoats. Tambour work and embroidered *gilets* were thus well-suited to rising consumer demand for a greater variety of lower-cost embroidered designs which could be produced and delivered to market quickly and efficiently. Furthermore, improvements in communications and infrastructure meant that the travel time between Paris and Lyon had significantly decreased by the late eighteenth century. A journey which would have once taken ten days in the seventeenth century had been halved to just five by the end of the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ This meant that Lyon-based embroidery merchants were able to satisfy the incessant consumer demand for novelty at a faster pace than ever before.

Stocking embroidery imported from Lyon was an important marketing boon for the Parisian *marchands merciers*. Lyon had long been supplying the court with silks, relying on the French court's position as a prominent tastemaker to market Lyonnais silks both in France and abroad since the early eighteenth century. Lyon thus had a long reputation of supplying the court, and Lyon-based producers recognised the benefits of supplying a courtly clientele who would be important advertising vehicles for Lyonnais silk.⁶⁵ Moreover, since these were the same consumers of Lyonnais silk as those who purchased the fashionable embroidery sold by the Parisian *marchands merciers*, they would have been familiar with the reputation of Lyon as a supplier of products which were well-made, luxurious and of the highest quality. The *marchands merciers* of Paris thus capitalised on the reputation of Lyon goods, resting sure in the knowledge that their customers were already familiar with Lyonnais products and could trust them in terms of both fashionability and quality. Lyon silks were both nationally and internationally sought after, particularly on the basis of their designs, the patterns of which were updated seasonally. Indeed, the Lyonnais had built up a strong reputation based on the skills of the silk designers of the *Grande Fabrique* (the Lyon silk-weaving guild), many of whom also lent their skills to embroidery design. The previous chapter demonstrated how Lyon emerged as a leader in taste in fashionable embroidery design and how the Lyonnais embroidery designers had

⁶³ ADR 8 B 1280/1-2: 'Villoud, Cadet et Cie, négociants', 1785-88.

⁶⁴ Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

a crucial role in repackaging embroidery as a fashionable ‘new’ luxury and distancing it from the ‘old’ ostentatious gold and silver embroidery associated with court garments. In the context of retailing, a high level of design consciousness among consumers, particularly in the late eighteenth century, meant that it was necessary for stockists of embroidery to supply their customers with a wide range of choice.⁶⁶ As such, an awareness of design, in part fostered by the emergence of the fashion press which promoted a preoccupation with individuality and novelty, resulted in a wide variety of choice supplied by the Lyonnais designers who were famed for creating fashionable designs.⁶⁷ Madame Auboineau stated that she sold ‘all sorts’ (*toutes sortes*) of waistcoats from Lyon at her shop at the Palais Royal, a reference likely to refer to the variety of designs available.⁶⁸ Such variety was conveyed to customers not only through the print advertisements of trade cards, bill heads and the periodical press, but through the use of material samples. The following section will look at how the Lyonnais embroiderers successfully used samples to sell their embroidery designs across long distances and forge important networks with the *marchands merciers* of Paris.

3.4 Samples

As Miller has shown in her work on eighteenth-century Lyonnais silk manufacturing, the use of samples was an important tool in selling silk to customers in Europe. The physicality of the samples enabled customers to gain a preview of what was on offer, giving them a taste of not only the novelty of the patterns, but also evidence of the quality that they were buying into.⁶⁹ Like the silk manufacturers of Lyon then, embroidery merchants such as Pascal, Vial et Cie also used samples as a tool to facilitate the sale of embroidery. Samples would have been shown to clients to display what designs and

⁶⁶ See Charles Saumarez Smith, cited in Anna Puetz, ‘Design Instruction for Artisans in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Journal of Design History*, 12/3 (1999), 217-39 (p. 220).

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between print culture and the dissemination of fashion, see McNeil, “‘Beauty in Search of Knowledge’: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the World of Print”, pp. 231-4.

⁶⁸ ADP D43Z/1.

⁶⁹ Miller, ‘Material Marketing: How Lyonnais Silk Manufacturers Sold Silks, 1660-1789’, in *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century: Comparative Perspectives from Western Europe*, ed. by Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 85-98.

materials were for sale, and these in turn could be adapted to suit the client's particular needs if required. The use of samples in selling textiles such as embroidery was a particularly effective marketing tool because samples revealed more accurately than written correspondence, the textures and colours of the proposed designs. New embroidery samples were regularly requested from merchants acting on behalf of Pascal across Europe, with Noé Ravy, a merchant from Turin, pleading with him in 1783 to send his latest samples as soon as possible due to the increase in orders that he was receiving.⁷⁰ Grogard regularly travelled with embroidered samples for gowns and suits from his partners in Lyon which he showed to his clients across Europe, including members of the Spanish court in Madrid.⁷¹

In the retailing context of embroidery, samples were sent to shopkeepers, merchants and traveling salesmen as a preview of the finished embroidered product. In turn, these individuals would show the samples to their customers. The sample would offer a taste of a part of the complete design, with an indication of the colours and materials to be used. For men's clothing, samples would be made available for coat and waistcoat pockets, the border that edged around the coat or waistcoat skirts, and buttons. For women's clothing, samples were most often created to show the extent of a design for the skirts of a gown (*bas d'étoffe de robe*) or the bodice. Figures 3.15 and 3.16 show two different samples of embroidery for a dress train which could have been from Lyon or Paris. The sample in figure 3.15 from the late eighteenth century shows a floral design embroidered in polychrome silks over cream satin which is contrasted with a monochrome embroidery in cream silks and silver spangles over a cream netting; the sample is large enough to demonstrate the full pattern repeat. The sample in figure 3.16, which dates to around 1785, is a piece of cream satin elaborately embroidered in polychrome silks, ribbons, lace and swan feathers. The pattern number (170) is indicated at the top of the sample and would be used for both customer and embroiderer or embroidery merchant to identify the chosen design. In Pascal's order books, the pattern number is indicated alongside a brief description of the sample and the price of the final embroidered product. For example, on 10 September 1785, Pascal recorded that he sent

⁷⁰ ADR 8 B 1089/4: 'Correspondence, Ravy to Pascal, Turin', 1783.

⁷¹ BML Fonds général ms. 1923: 'Correspondence between François Grogard and Camille Pernon, Peyron et Cie', 1787-1801.

pattern 4, a sample of 'Fabric for the train of a gown of white *gros de Naples* embroidered [...], the complete dress of 16 *aunes* at 200 *livres* 10 *sols* 14 *deniers*.'⁷²

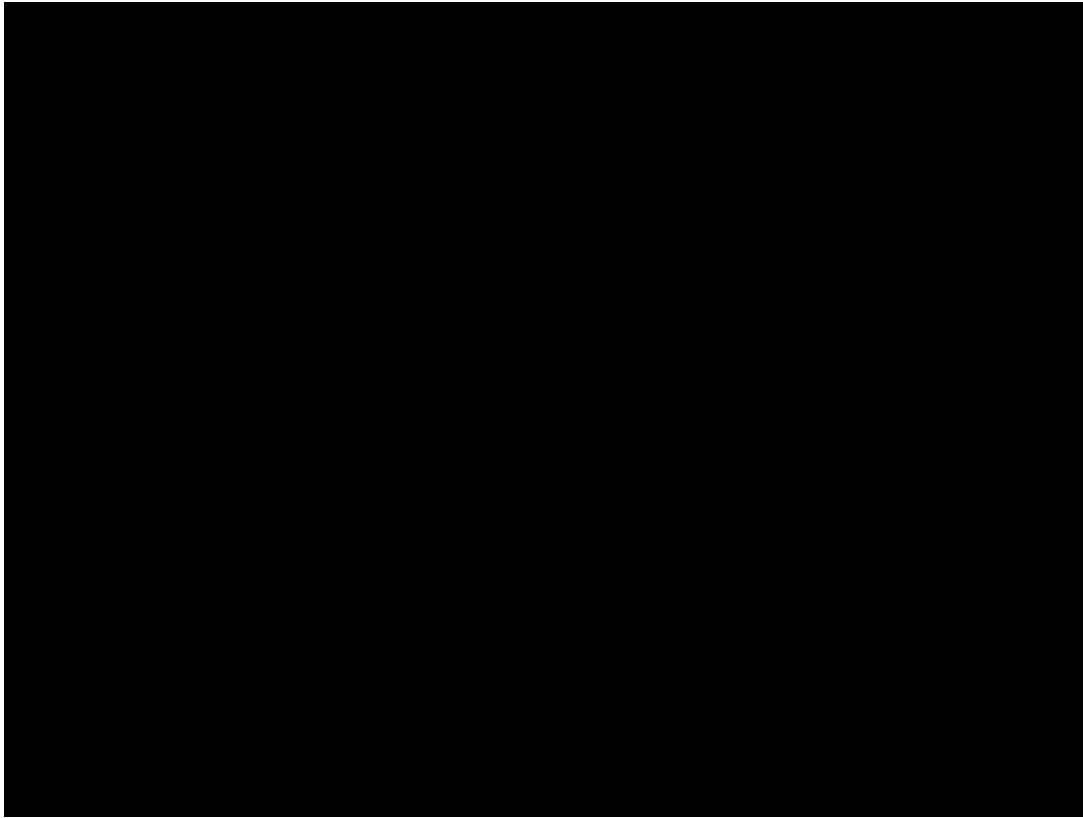


Figure 3.15. Court dress panel, silk, chenille and metal thread embroidery on satin, 188.5 × 75 cm, France, c.1780. T. 89-1967. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁷² 'Un bas d'étoffe de robe gros de naple blanc brodée [...] la robe complete de 16 aunes à 200 livres 10 sols 14 deniers', ADR 8 B 1089/12, 10 September 1785. Miller has noted that a gown would require 10-15 ells (*aunes*) of fabric and that retail prices for silks could vary between 2 and 400 *livres* per ell, with the highest prices reserved for silks with metal threads. Pascal's dress fabric in this particular example works out to between 12 and 13 *livres* per ell, placing it on a similar level to a mid-range figured silk such as a *gros de naples façonné* which retailed for 11 *livres* per ell in the V&A merchant's sample book (T. 373-1972). See Miller, *Selling Silks*, p. 6 and p. 17.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 3.16. Embroidery sample for court gown (patron n° 170), silk and chenille embroidery on satin, 52. 5 × 55 cm, France, 1804-15. MT 48994. © MTMAD.

Samples could be distributed in a range of sizes, depending on the extent of the design, the size of the intended final product, and the expensive nature of the materials. The embroidered dress fabric samples above are at the larger end of the scale for embroidery samples. In this case, they demonstrate the extent of the elaborate design which would likely have been intended for a court dress. Embroidery designs for female dress were also likely to be larger since a greater amount of material was required to construct a woman's gown. By contrast, embroidery samples for male clothing, such as the borders for suits and waistcoats, were usually on a smaller scale, normally being produced to a size in which the pattern could be easily discerned, but still small enough to be posted with regular correspondence. The examples at the Musée des Tissus in Lyon and the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York suggest that such samples were rectangular and measured around 20 cm x 15 cm in size (figures 3.17 and 3.18). Figure 3.17 is a sample of embroidery attributed to Jean-François Bony; the design which is embroidered in gold spangles and metal thread shows the full repeat pattern for the border of a male suit or waistcoat. In the top right-hand corner, the remnants of a wax seal indicate that the sample was sent via the postal service and likely accompanied the commercial correspondence between embroiderer or embroidery merchant and their

client. The physicality of the samples – the small shapes and the evidence of it having been posted – indicate the geographical distances over which the business of embroidery was conducted. Not just restricted to the local, the professional embroiderers of Lyon supplied consumers both nationally and internationally, with the samples enabling them to form long-distance networks and successfully sell their products on a wide geographical scale.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 3.17. Embroidery sample, metal thread embroidery with *paillettes* on silk with metal threads, 16.5 × 24.3 cm, France, late eighteenth century. MT 18512. © MTMAD.

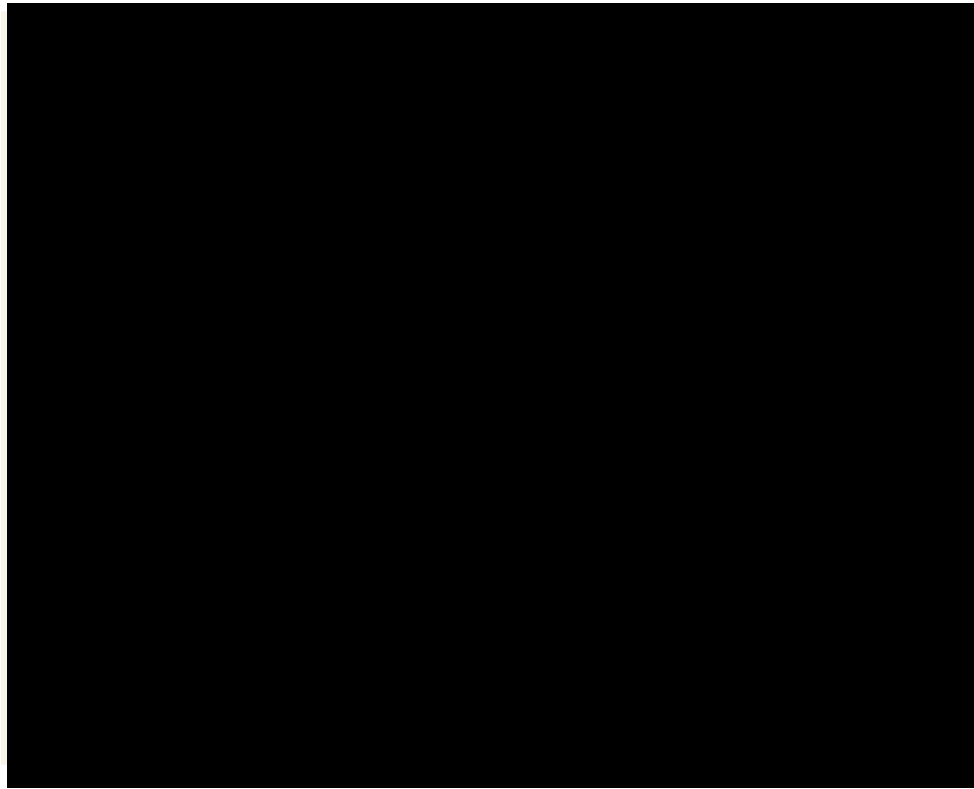


Figure 3.18. Embroidery sample, silk embroidery on cut and voided velvet, 22 × 16.5 cm, France, 1780-95. 1932-1-28. © Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

A comparison of the written descriptions of the embroidered samples with the material evidence of surviving samples highlights the importance of the physical sample to the retailing process of embroidery. Whilst descriptive, the entries written in Pascal's order books which detail the samples sent out to his customers do not provide a clear picture of the product and its embroidery. A customer faced with this level of information would not be able to confidently visualise the product in which he was investing. For example, in one entry, Pascal recorded that he sent a sample of pattern 87, a 'suit border on grey satin embroidered in shaded gold and colour', the complete suit of which would cost 240 *livres*, to Messieurs Josserain & Calliac on 28 November 1778.⁷³ Against the relatively limited vocabulary of motifs, the ground colour of the satin and embroidery stand out as important, indicating that colour was an important factor in conveying fashionability. Moreover, samples served a range of purposes and their intended audience was not limited to the final consumer of the product. Whilst samples would indeed have been shown to the customer by *marchands merciers* and travelling salespeople and

⁷³ 'Bordure d'habit sur satin gris brodé or nuancée & couleur', ADR 8 B 1089/12, 28 November 1778.

merchants, the samples were just as much intended for the middleman himself: embroidery merchants were eager to persuade mercers to stock their products and order more commissions. The role of the physical sample was therefore to provide material evidence of the descriptions which embroidery merchants such as Pascal communicated in their business correspondence, and to provide *marchands merciers* with evidence of the quality which was promised. The samples indicated the physical evidence of a commercial relationship, one in which the *marchand mercier* could rely on embroidery merchants such as Pascal to deliver products which were fashionable, of high quality workmanship, and in a timely manner.

The number of samples sent by Pascal to *marchands merciers* in Paris, Lyon and elsewhere both nationally and internationally, suggests that the use of samples was an effective yet risky strategy in the retailing of embroidery. Between 1778 and 1788, Pascal sent out 641 embroidered samples to merchants across France and Europe, an average of approximately five samples per month. This is a tentative estimation if we take into consideration the enormous variety of designs available (Pascal's order books detail pattern numbers from 1-470). The production and distribution of samples was a serious investment for embroidery merchants. It was time intensive and cost money, with no guarantee that such samples would generate sales. Embroiderers who produced the samples would need to be paid for their work, and whilst it was less time-consuming than embroidering a complete design, it was time involved that could conceivably have been spent on a complete commissioned piece, for which the profit would be more substantial. Further to this, sending samples was time dependent on the postal service (six days to Paris) and the deliberations of the *marchands merciers* once they had received the samples. This period of time would be extended if they requested alterations to the design and demanded new samples before they would commit. Finally, the use of samples as a marketing tool did not guarantee sales. Embroidery merchants would often have to chase their clients in order to consolidate sales, responding to their silence with offers of the latest products at competitive prices.⁷⁴ Samples were also possibly a form of early market research for embroidery merchants such as Pascal, who would be able to test the demand for their designs before commissioning the complete product. Such a strategy would

⁷⁴ This was a tactic of Fiard, a *marchand fabricant de soieries* in Lyon, who would write to his clients from whom he had not heard. See ADR 8 B 876/27: 'Copies de lettres envoys'.

ensure that time and resources were not wasted, essential in a precarious luxury market where fashions could change quickly.

3.5 Ready-Made and Made to Measure: Towards Standardisation?

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the channels through which embroidery was sold diversified over the course of the eighteenth century. This section will examine the physical form in which embroidery was sold, focusing on the ready-embroidered panels for waistcoats, suits and dresses. Let us here return to the October 1786 issues of the *Cabinet des modes* which were presented in the introduction to this chapter: 'If it is not exactly that which makes us want to abandon embroidery, it is that those who believe they are distinguished by a rich suit, see themselves soon challenged'.⁷⁵ According to the *Cabinet des modes*, then, distinction could not be achieved through rich materials alone, since clothing embroidered in gold and silver was widely available on the second-hand clothing market long after its shelf life of fashionability. As we saw in the previous chapters, the fashion for heavy gold and silver embroidery in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries gave way to a preference for lighter embellishment in the second half of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the phrase with which the editors of the *Cabinet des modes* condemned the *habit brodé* in 1786 is essential to understanding the multifaceted market for embroidery in France by the end of the eighteenth century. That 'once on the body, no one will ask whether it was bought ready-made, or whether one had it made' seems to be particularly worrisome for the publication reflects the hierarchical nature of the embroidery trade, the perceived importance of consumer choice in the luxury markets, and the various channels through which embroidery could be bought by the 1780s.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, there is a methodological issue in distinguishing between the terms 'ready-made' and 'to have had it made', due mainly to the fact that clear distinctions are not made in the sources. Retailers did not specify this information in their trade cards, they stated simply that they sold embroidered waistcoats. Similarly, Lyonnais embroidery merchants such as Pascal, Vial et Cie, Villoud, Cadet et Cie, and Villeneuve recorded in their order and day books, as having sold or commissioned embroidered waistcoats, gowns or shoes. There is no reference to them

⁷⁵ *Cabinet des modes, ou les modes nouvelles*, 1 October 1786, pp. 172-3.

being ‘complete’ or as ‘panels’. Returning again to the court embroiderers such as Balzac, they too recorded their activities as having embroidered a waistcoat, suit or gown. Yet legally, Balzac would not have been able to sell such garments as complete, for this was the prerogative of the tailors. In navigating the concept of ‘ready-made’, it is thus important to situate ‘ready-made’ within the wider context of the garment trades in eighteenth-century France, trades which were highly specialised due to the guild system.

‘Ready-made’ could therefore imply quite simply that it had been bought from a second-hand clothes dealer (*fripier*), who was legally entitled to sell already-made up garments. It could also mean that it was bought ready-embroidered and then made up by a tailor. Conversely, ‘to have had it made’ could also mean the same as this latter interpretation; that it was bought in the form of panels, which were then ‘made up’ by a tailor (see figure 3.19). Alternatively, ‘to have had it made’ could be interpreted as being a suit which had been specially commissioned for that individual, and that he or she had liaised directly with an embroiderer and had personally selected the design, colours and materials. Since this latter definition was most applicable to a court suit and thus not entirely in line with ‘fashion’, it is likely that ‘ready-made’ referred to second-hand garments and ‘to have had it made’ implied the purchase of embroidered panels to be made up by a tailor. This makes sense if we are to acknowledge again the promotion of embroidered satin waistcoats in the *Cabinet des modes*: such waistcoats would have been sold in this way.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 3.19. Waistcoat shape, silk embroidery on satin, France, c. 1775. MT 27228. © MTMAD.

The ready-made clothing industry as we recognise it today, with standardised sizing and mass-produced garments, did not develop fully in France until the 1840s.⁷⁶ Its relatively late development compared to that of Britain can be attributed to the fact that the Parisian garment trades were tightly regulated by the guild system throughout the *ancien régime* and continued to replicate such traditions until the early nineteenth century.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ On the development of the ready-made clothing industry in Paris, see Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, in particular pp. 36-57.

⁷⁷ Beverly Lemire has noted that the ready-made clothing market flourished from the second half of the seventeenth century in England, thanks in part to the increase in domestic manufacture by low-paid female workers and the changes in guild regulations, mainly that of the tailors' guilds.

Yet the Parisian *fripeliers* were important precursors to the ready-made clothing industry. According to Roche, in the eighteenth century they essentially invented ‘prêt-à-porter’ with their technique of selling nearly-new clothes which allowed the wider population to access fashionable items a short time after their peak of fashionability.⁷⁸ The *fripeliers* were selling ‘ready-made’ or ‘ready-to-wear’ clothing in the sense that such garments were not made to measure for the wearer.⁷⁹ In fact, their guild statutes of 1664 granted them permission to manufacture new garments on the premise that these were not made to measure.⁸⁰ As Roche has noted, the *fripeliers* were not immune to the shifts in fashion and their stock quite often reflected the tastes and spending power of their local customers.

The garments produced by these early putting-out systems were simple and not fashionable per se; they included shirts, caps, and petticoats etc.; the female bodice was one such item produced in ‘bulk’ and constituted an essential item of daily wear for women. Military contracts transformed the ready-made clothing industry further still in Britain; the growing demand for large quantities of army and navy garments, such as jackets and breeches, threatened the artisanal craft of the tailor who found themselves having to adapt from producing made-to-measure clothing to operating workshops defined by waged labour and piece-work. The occupation of ‘clothes dealer’ became more commonplace from the second half of the seventeenth century and such individuals stocked both new and second-hand clothing. See Lemire, ‘Developing Consumerism and the Ready-Made Clothing Trade in Britain 1750-1800’; Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, pp. 43-74. On the history of the ready-made clothing trade in Britain, see also: Stanley Chapman, ‘The Innovating Entrepreneurs in the British Ready-made Clothing Industry’, *Textile History*, 24/1 (1993), 5-25; Andrew Godley, ‘The Development of the Clothing Industry: Technology and Fashion’, *Textile History*, 28/1 (1997), 3-10; Sarah Levitt, ‘Cheap Mass-Produced Men’s Clothing in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *Textile History*, 22/2 (1991), 179-92; Pamela Sharpe, “‘Cheapness and Economy’: Manufacturing and Retailing Ready-made Clothing in London and Essex 1830-50”, *Textile History*, 26/2 (1995), 203-13.

⁷⁸ See also Patricia Allerston, ‘Clothing and Early Modern Venetian Society’, *Continuity and Change*, 15/3 (2000), 367-390. Allerston has similarly shown that second-hand dealers played an essential role in the market for clothing in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice. Allerston notes that Venetian second-hand dealers were also organised into a guild and supplied a broad section of society with clothing and textiles in a variety of qualities and prices. As such, a wide cross-section of the Venetian population was able to ‘participate in the clothing market in some means or form.’ See Allerston, ‘Clothing and Early Modern Venetian Society’, p. 370.

⁷⁹ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, pp. 356-7.

⁸⁰ Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, p. 42.

Some even specialised in particular fashionable garments, such as coats and waistcoats. Others explicitly marketed themselves as suppliers of second-hand clothing which came directly from the wardrobes of the court.⁸¹

The *fripeliers* sold a wide variety of second-hand clothing in order to appeal to a broad cross-section of society and it was not unknown for their second-hand stock to cost more than new. A second-hand embroidered velvet suit in gold and silver for example would cost more than a brand new woollen suit without embroidery. As Coquery has pointed out, second-hand goods did not necessarily equate to inferior quality.⁸² The prices of their products varied according to the quality, cut, finish and decoration of the fabric. Roche has found evidence of an embroidered silk coat being sold for 216 *livres*, compared to a waistcoat of 'shabby cloth' for 17 *sous*, for example.⁸³ Evidently, the second-hand clothing trade did not only serve the lower classes, since a coat of this price would have cost an unskilled labourer their entire annual salary; an artisan would have had to have saved six months' wages to buy such an item; and even a successful businessman, such as a silk manufacturer, would have to spend between one and one and a half month's wages.⁸⁴ The type of person who might have afforded this coat, other than a noble, would likely to have been a wealthy bourgeois, such as a minister in the royal government.⁸⁵ Indeed, 12 percent of those who owed money to Parisian *fripeliers* were nobles and clerics.⁸⁶ The concerns of the *Cabinet des modes* could not therefore have been founded upon a widespread phenomenon of the labouring classes donning richly-embroidered garments that they had bought at a second-hand clothes dealer in order to ape their social superiors; it was simply beyond their economic means. Rather, although aristocratic individuals were not unknown to frequent the shops of the *fripeliers*,⁸⁷ the

⁸¹ Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*, p. 107.

⁸² Coquery, 'The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', p. 84.

⁸³ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 357.

⁸⁴ Based on information on contemporary income in Sgard, 'L'Échelle des revenus'.

⁸⁵ According to Sgard, the annual income of the wealthy bourgeoisie was in the region of 5,000 to 20,000 *livres*. See Sgard, 'L'Échelle des revenus', p. 427.

⁸⁶ Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 360.

⁸⁷ Coquery has shown that the markets for new goods and second-hand goods were closely connected, since aristocratic individuals would dispose of their quality goods in exchange for credit or other novelties. It was partly the aristocratic desire to be constantly in possession of the

second-hand clothing market was viewed by some with deep suspicion. The uncertain origin of second-hand clothes meant that garments bought in this way often had connotations of theft, and the growing preoccupation with hygiene throughout the eighteenth century led to an association of second-hand clothes and textiles with disease.⁸⁸ Such dealings thus had no place amongst the genteel classes who, as we saw in the previous chapter, prided themselves on displaying notions of taste and politeness. Instead, the denunciation in the *Cabinet des modes* was a preoccupation specific to elite fashion, the codes of which were dictated by individuality, variety and novelty. Whilst the concept of 'ready-to-wear' or 'ready-made' as developed by the Parisian *fripier*s, was transforming the way in which Parisians were able to acquire clothes and participate in what Roche has termed the 'culture of appearances', the idea of 'ready-made' in this sense was not an important selling point in the realm of elite retail. For foreign visitors to Paris for example, 'having a suit made was part of the ritual.'⁸⁹ Yet at the same time, the elite classes demanded a greater variety of goods at an ever-faster pace. The embroidered waistcoat panels and other ready-embroidered lengths of fabric, such as suits and gowns, were therefore a perfect antidote to such a level of consumerism and occupied a place somewhere between 'ready-made' and 'made to measure'.

For the waistcoats lauded in the fashion press during the 1780s, the editors of the *Cabinet des modes* advised their subscribers to address themselves to a Mr Jubin, silk merchant (*marchand d'étoffes de soie*). Jubin sold such waistcoats and others in the 'best taste'

latest fashions which fueled the second-hand market and gave rise to the semi-luxury market. See Coquery, 'The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', p. 84.

⁸⁸ Bruno Blondé and Jon Stobart, 'Introduction: Selling Textiles in the Eighteenth Century: Perspectives on Consumer and Retail Change', in *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century*, pp. 1-12 (p. 9). See also Ilja Van Damme, 'Second-Hand Trade and Respectability: Mediating Consumer Trust in Old Textiles and Used Clothing (Low Countries, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)', in *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century*, pp. 193-209. Although second-hand clothing had long been associated with disease, it was not until the advent of 'germ theory' in the late nineteenth century that this was scientifically proven by Louis Pasteur in the 1860s. Pasteur's findings led to the implementation of policies by the end of the nineteenth century to disinfect and properly launder clothing and linens in public institutions such as hospitals. See Alison Matthews David, *Fashion Victims: The Dangers of Dress Past and Present* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2015), p. 35.

⁸⁹ Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, p. 39.

(*meilleur goût*) at his shop *Aux trois Mandarins*, which was located at the Palais Royal, near to the *Théâtre des Variétés*. According to the *Cabinet des modes*' advertisement, Jubin was well-known for his integrity and fair prices.⁹⁰ Indeed, a number of shops at the Palais Royal sold these fashionable and new embroidered waistcoats;⁹¹ a previous issue of the *Cabinet des modes* had already drawn attention to the many silk merchants at the Palais Royal who had begun to sell these products. Capitalising on this trend, the *marchands merciers* of Paris began to advertise specifically that they sold embroidered waistcoats in their shops (see for example figures 3.20- 3.23).

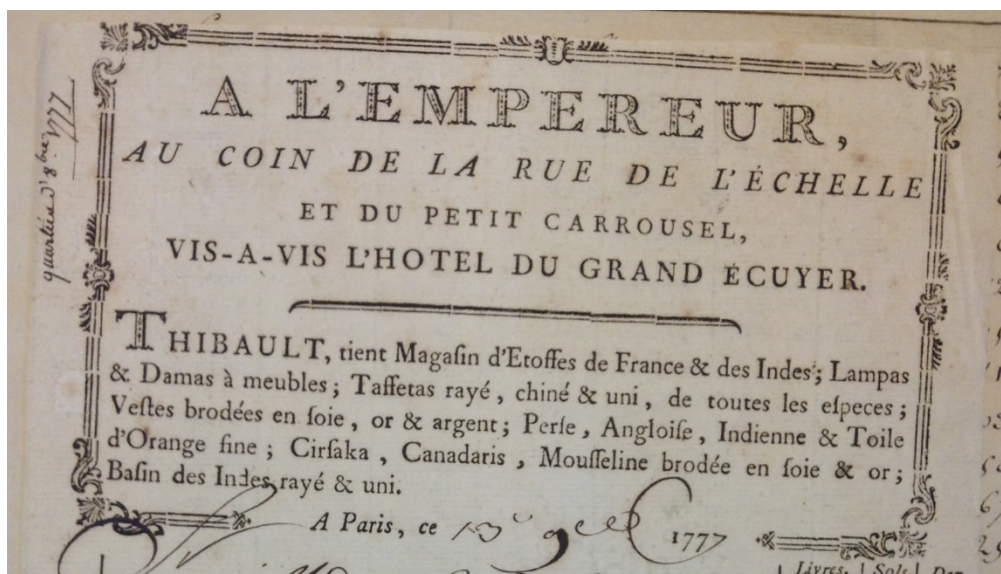


Figure 3.20. Bill head for *A L'Empereur*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 20 × 15 cm, 1777. AN T 265/4-5.

⁹⁰ *Cabinet des modes*, 15 October 1786, p. 184.

⁹¹ Perrot writes that by the mid-nineteenth century, 'the galleries of the Palais Royal sheltered a flashy trade in which looks replace quality. There, tailors specialized in new clothes, ready-to-wear instead of made-to-order'. See Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, p. 41. The sale of ready-embroidered waistcoat panels sold by the *marchands merciers* of the Palais Royal in the late eighteenth century could therefore be viewed as a precursor to the advent of ready-made clothing which took off in Paris in the 1840s.

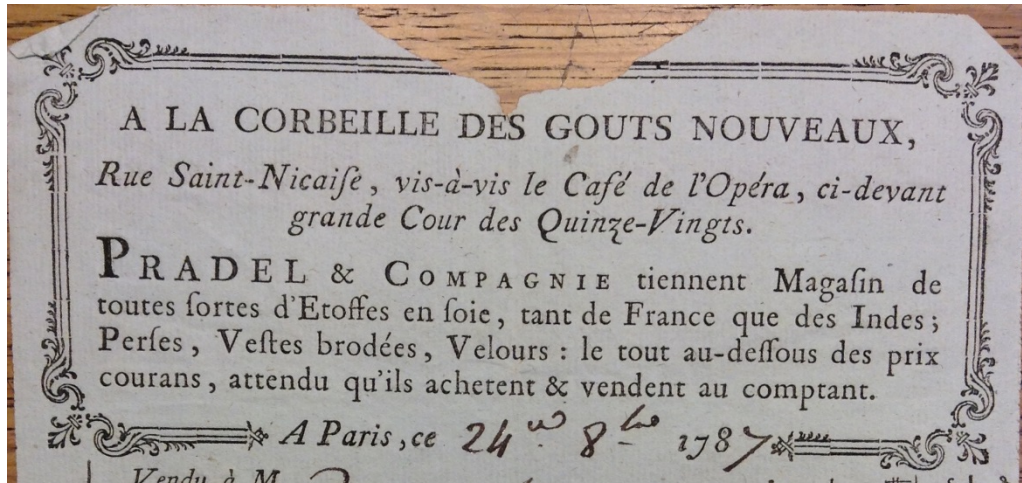


Figure 3.21. Bill head for *A La Corbeille des Gouts Nouveaux*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 16 × 10cm, 1787. AN T 385-386.

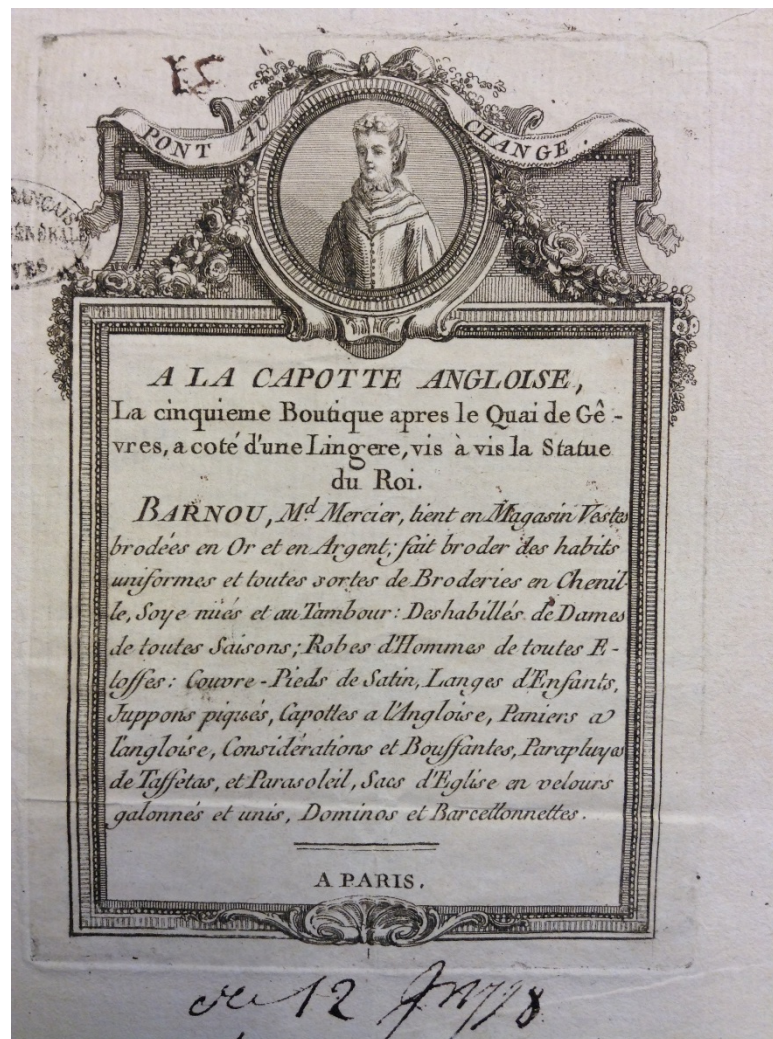


Figure 3.22. Bill head for *A La Capotte Angloise*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 9 × 12 cm, 1778. AN T 385-386.



Figure 3.23. Bill head for *A La Grille Royale*, etching and engraving on paper, approx. 14 × 12 cm, c. 1780. ADP D43Z/2.

Away from the constraining codes of etiquette at Versailles, which dictated styles of formal clothing, the new style of embroidered waistcoat enabled men to experiment with new codes of fashionability. As the baronne d'Oberkirch, prolific court commentator, noted: 'It was absolutely essential to have *gilets* by the dozens, even by the hundreds, if one intended to set the fashion [...] It was extraordinarily expensive.'⁹² Unlike court clothing then, which was certainly not bought in high volume, such waistcoats signified a move towards new ways of consuming embroidery, which was characterised by the faster pace of change associated with fashion and novelty. Whilst the purchase of 'hundreds' of these waistcoats would indeed have been expensive, Oberkirch's observation is somewhat exaggerated. For they were cheaper than the ornate embroidered waistcoats in gold and silver worn at court, meaning that it was certainly affordable for the aristocratic consumer to buy such waistcoats 'by the dozen'. Table 3.2 shows the prices at which one Lyonnais embroidery merchant sold their waistcoats. Allowing for a mark-up of 15-20 percent by the Paris mercers, the final retail price of an

⁹² Quoted in Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 238. See also Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 27.

embroidered waistcoat in the form of panels was much cheaper than those sold by the court embroiderers.⁹³

| Type | Price |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <i>Tamy</i> (tambour) | 7 <i>livres</i> |
| | 12 <i>livres</i> |
| | 14 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Tamy au couleur</i> (tambour in colours) | 7 <i>livres</i> 10 <i>sols</i> |
| <i>Soye petit point</i> (silk in tent stitch) | 13 <i>livres</i> 10 <i>sols</i> |
| <i>Passé</i> (satin stitch) | 14 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Soye en argent</i> (silk and silver) | 15 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Soye dorure</i> (silk and metal threads) | 15 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Argent</i> (silver) | 24 <i>livres</i> |

Table 3.2. Prices of embroidered waistcoats sold by Villoud, Cadet et Cie, 1785-88.

Source: 8 B 1280/1-2.

Added to this the final tailoring costs in having the embroidered panels made up to one's individual measurements, it is not surprising that the popularity of embroidered waistcoats significantly increased in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the process of having a suit or waistcoat embroidered and made up was usually arranged between the embroiderer and tailor, or another third party such as a servant or female family member, such as wife, mother or sister. Ready-embroidered panels were not necessarily available for instant purchase during these early years of the eighteenth century, and the design process could be a lengthy one of negotiation, re-negotiation and approval. By the late eighteenth century,

⁹³ The profit made by the *marchands merciers* on embroidered products is difficult to establish. Sargentson's study of the Parisian *marchand mercier* Lazare Duvaux shows that he made an average profit of 10% on the mirrors that he sold, another luxury item. See Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*, p. 34. In light of the correspondence between Pascal and his nephew Claude, who claimed that embroidered waistcoats were being sold at the Palais Royal for between 20 and 25 *livres*, a profit of 15-20% seems feasible.

⁹⁴ Tailoring costs were generally cheaper than the materials.

not only were ready-embroidered waistcoat panels available in an enormous variety of designs, but their availability as panels meant that it was an easy and quick item to purchase in the fashionable shops of Paris, and it cost significantly less than the elaborate gold and silver embroidery associated with court clothing. It is likely that such panels were also stocked in the Lyonnais shops, along with lengths of silk.⁹⁵ Indeed, evidence suggests that tourists passed through Lyon and bought embroidery there.⁹⁶ There is less information on what was stocked in the Lyonnais shops, possibly because most of the negotiation was conducted in person, and so this cannot be confirmed for certain. However, the order books for Lyon merchants indicate that they sent orders containing numerous items at a time to their customers, suggesting that the Lyon merchants conducted their business mostly over long-distance.⁹⁷

In the fashionable context of Paris, where changes in fashion were fast paced, the consumption of these popular embroidered waistcoats enabled men to keep up to date with the latest styles which appeared regularly in the fashion press. Indeed, the eighteenth century witnessed a profound change in the way in which consumers acquired goods, for it was now possible to acquire a greater variety of products in a shorter amount of time. It was thus essential that the *marchands merciers* and the embroiderers were able to consistently supply a variety of tastes to consumers who were now becoming familiar with the concept of being able to purchase items quickly and easily. The producers ensured that there was enough variety to choose from. Indeed, the surviving objects and paper embroidery designs in museum collections around the world suggest that there was a lot of variety during the late eighteenth century, with 316 designs conserved at the

⁹⁵ Miller, *Selling Silks*, p. 26.

⁹⁶ See for example Grantham's correspondence in Chapter 2. Robert Adam, the Scottish architect, also bought waistcoats in Lyon on his way to Italy, for example. See Miller, *Selling Silks*, p. 23. On Lyon shops, see also Françoise Bayard, 'De quelques boutiques de marchands de tissus à Lyon et en Beaujolais aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', in 'De la fibre à la fripe'. *Le textile dans la France méridionale et l'Europe méditerranéenne (XVIIe-XXe siècles)*, ed. by Geneviève Gavingnaud-Fontaine, Henri Michel and Elie Pélaquier (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 1998), pp. 430-58.

⁹⁷ Bayard's research on the Lyon merchant Bonaventure Carret shows that Lyon merchants preferred to send products in 'bulk' due to the high carriage costs. See Bayard, 'L'Europe de Bonaventure Carret et des ses associés, marchands Lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle', in *Commerce, voyage et expérience religieuse XVI-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. by Albrecht Burkardt, Gilles Bertrand and Yves Krumenacker (Rennes: Presses Universitaires), pp. 55-86.

Musée des Tissus in Lyon, for example.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the order books for the Lyonnais embroidery merchants from the second half of the eighteenth century are important evidence of this fact. Pascal had at least 470 designs to choose from, for example.

But it was not just in Paris that these embroidered products were in high demand. The previous chapter explored the ways in which shared notions of ‘taste’ were essential to the process of ‘proxy’ shopping for French embroidery by foreign consumers. Informal networks of consumers, such as those formed between family members, friends and colleagues (particularly those in the diplomatic service), constituted an important international distribution channel for French embroidered products. Embroidered waistcoat and dress panels would have been well-suited to the international market, since they would have been relatively easy to pack and transport with little risk of damage. Further still, the large variety of designs produced by Lyonnais embroiderers satisfied international clients such as foreign tourists and diplomats, who as we saw in Chapter 2, demanded a product which was both reasonably priced and in the latest style or taste. Despite protectionist policies in countries such as Britain, which banned the importation of foreign silks and other luxury products, the embroidery trade in France readily supplied British consumers.⁹⁹ As William Farrell, Michael Kwass and Susan North have shown, the smuggling of European contraband goods into Britain was a regular occurrence during the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Whilst French fashions and those who followed them may have been satirised throughout the period by British contemporaries such as William Hogarth, such attacks ‘did not necessarily divert consumers to a British substitute product.’¹⁰¹ Instead, French embroidery, such as these waistcoat panels which were seized

⁹⁸ Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, *Gilets brodés: modèles du XVIIIe, musée des Tissus, Lyon* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), p. 12. See also Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion of embroidery designs.

⁹⁹ The importation of foreign silks was prohibited in 1765 and this ban remained in place until the 1820s.

¹⁰⁰ See: William Farrell, ‘Smuggling Silks into Eighteenth-Century Britain: Geography, Perpetrators, and Consumers’, *Journal of British Studies*, 55 (2016), 268-94; Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Susan North, ‘The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction: A Pair of 1750s Waistcoat Shapes’, *Textile History*, 39/1 (2008), 92-104.

¹⁰¹ Farrell, ‘Smuggling Silks into Eighteenth-Century Britain: Geography, Perpetrators, and Consumers’, p. 272.

at Dover in the 1760s (figure 3.24), was smuggled by individuals such as diplomats into the country.¹⁰² Farrell's research has shown that French embroidery was seized on the premises of several London tailors during the eighteenth century, and that elite individuals in particular fuelled the illegal trade in luxury goods from France due to the practicalities of enforcing customs policies on individuals with high social, political and economic currency.¹⁰³ Ready-embroidered panels of silk could thus be easily smuggled into the country by individuals if they were packed into luggage or boxes.

¹⁰² For a detailed history of these waistcoat shapes, see North, 'The Physical Manifestation of an Abstraction: A Pair of 1750s Waistcoat Shapes'. French silks were often smuggled by high-status individuals, such as foreign ambassadors, into the country for their personal consumption or for family members and friends. Due to diplomats' immunity from prosecution, the investigations of customs officials were made difficult. See Farrell, 'Smuggling Silks into Eighteenth-Century Britain: Geography, Perpetrators, and Consumers', p. 289.

¹⁰³ Farrell, 'Smuggling Silks into Eighteenth-Century Britain: Geography, Perpetrators, and Consumers', p. 285 and pp. 291-3.

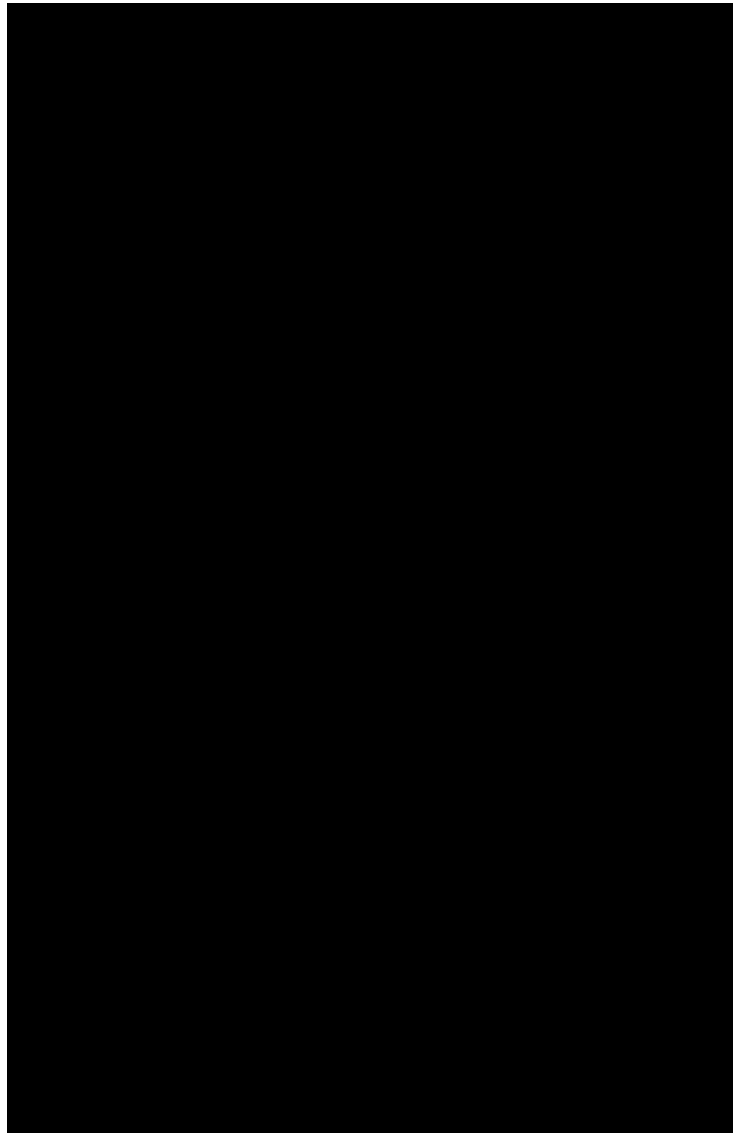


Figure 3.24. Pair of waistcoat shapes (Piece 2), silk embroidery on ribbed silk, France, 1750-1759. T.12-1981. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

The long-distance trade of ready-embroidered panels also suggests a step towards size standardisation. As Andrew Godley has noted of the development of the ready-made clothing industry in the nineteenth century, ‘the key innovation which allowed demand to grow on such a scale was [...] not technology but standard sizing.’¹⁰⁴ Prior to the 1840s then, it has been suggested that any attempt towards standardised garment sizes resulted

¹⁰⁴ Godley, ‘The Development of the Clothing Industry: Technology and Fashion’, p. 6.

in the production of pre-assembled clothes which were only loosely fitting.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, there is evidence that towards the end of the eighteenth century, Parisian tailors built upon the enterprises of the *fripier*s by establishing shops which stocked ready-made clothes in a range of sizes with claims of being in the latest fashion.¹⁰⁶ Further evidence from the embroidery trade suggests that there was indeed an element of size standardisation in the later years of the eighteenth century. Ready-embroidered waistcoat, suit and dress panels for example, were not produced to the measurements of an individual. The absence of sizing instructions in commercial correspondence and the order books, and the fact that embroidered panels were ordered in ‘bulk’ by Parisian *marchands merciers* once a month (some would order up to 40 items in one commission) suggest that there was a variety of sized panels to suit a variety of sizes. Again, the guild system is important for understanding the context of sizing and standardisation in eighteenth-century France. The silks which constituted the woven base of embroidery were of a standard width. Guild regulations in Lyon stipulated figured silks to be woven at 54.5 cm wide (excluding selvages), although plain silks could be wider than this.¹⁰⁷ This therefore dictated how the embroiderers worked, for the waistcoat to be embroidered *à disposition* would need to fit within the silk width. It seems that the only instance of when sizing was explicitly mentioned was when the measurements were deemed to be abnormal and thus required more specific instructions. For example, on 20 May 1778 Pascal took an order from M. Bertrant & Fils for an assortment of 30 embroidered waistcoats and suits, of which one was ‘a complete suit of waistcoat, breeches, garters and buttons embroidered on a background of grey *gros de Naples*, the colour of ash, for a man of the tallest and widest size’.¹⁰⁸ The embroidered waistcoat panels in figures 3.19, 3.24 and 3.25. indicate how this might have worked. In figures 3.19 and 3.24, one waistcoat front fills the full width of the silk, whilst in figure 3.25, two fronts have been fitted onto one width.

¹⁰⁵ For example, the Parisian *marchand mercier* Pierre Parissot who sold such garments in his shop from 1824 onwards. See: Godley, ‘The Development of the Clothing Industry: Technology and Fashion’, p. 6; Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, pp. 36-57.

¹⁰⁶ See Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, pp. 360-1.

¹⁰⁷ Miller, *Selling Silks*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Un habit complet veste, culottes, jarret. & Bouttons Brodé sur un fond gros de nape gris couleur de cendres pour un homme de la plus haute taille & grosseur’. ADR 8 B 1089/12: 20 mai 1778.

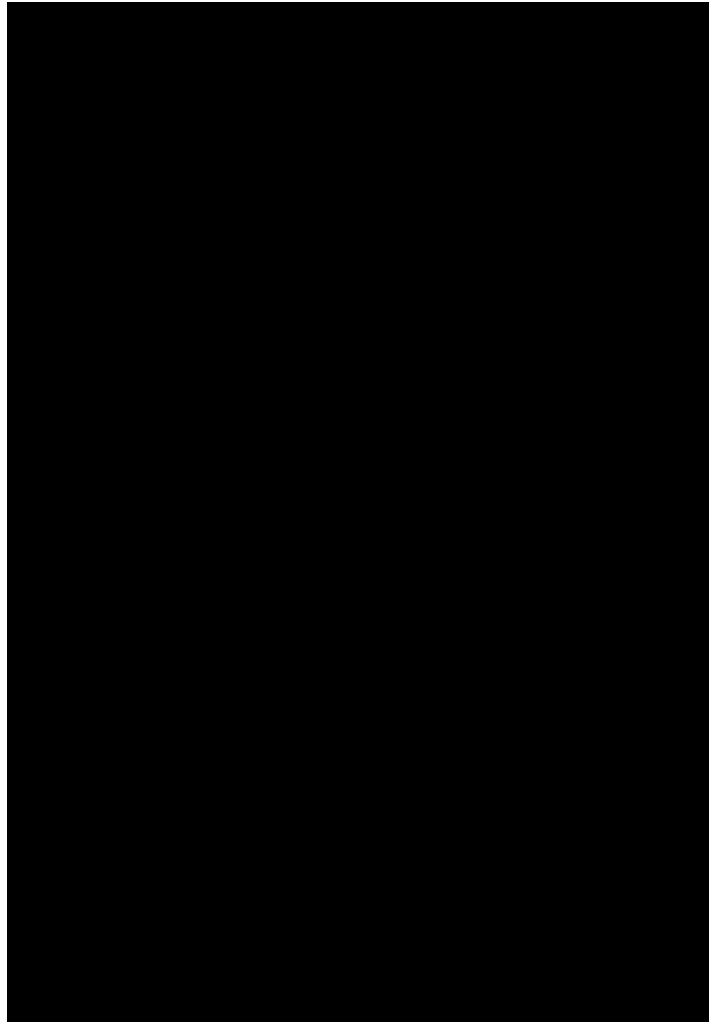


Figure 3.25. Waistcoat shape, silk embroidery on ribbed silk, France, 1780s. T. 427-1994. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

How waistcoats were made and worn suggests why sizing might matter less than for a coat, and can go some way to explaining the element of standardisation found in this type of embroidery. In polite circles, the waistcoat was always worn under a coat; only the decorated fronts of the waistcoat (the embroidered panels) were therefore visible and needed to fit. The back, in contrast, was made of a plain and cheaper material, usually linen, fustian, or later cotton, and was not on show. This would have been assembled by a tailor to fit the individual, with the back being adjusted by a buckle at the lower back, all of which would not have been visible underneath the coat.

It seems then that ready-embroidered panels represented a step towards the standardisation found within the later ready-made clothing trade. In her study of the ready-made garment trades of early modern England, Lemire takes the example of the quilted petticoat as a garment which showed early signs of standardisation, noting that it

was produced on a ready-made basis (particularly since it could be easily adjusted and therefore did not need to be made to measure) and offered customers a large variety of designs which enabled them to participate in seasonal fashions.¹⁰⁹ In particular, for Lemire, ‘variety in design and fabric, speed of manufacture and a basic competence in execution were the hallmarks of this type of production’.¹¹⁰ In the case of the ready-embroidered waistcoat panels, speed was certainly a feature of their production. Bertrant & Fils’ order for 30 items was turned around by Pascal within a month, for example. Variety too was a characteristic of these products, with the range of designs that were available being enormous. What distinguishes the waistcoats and other ready-embroidered panels however, was their adherence to high-quality professional needlework.¹¹¹ Quality was not sacrificed for standardisation. The ready-made embroidered panels for waistcoats and suiting which were produced by the professional embroiderers represented a step towards the standardisation of the ready-made garments produced on a larger scale in the mid-nineteenth century, yet maintained the distinction of high-quality skill. This notion of quality, along with the fact that such garments still maintained a degree of ‘made to measure’, meant that these products were a firm staple of elite retail.

Conclusion

The multifaceted ways in which embroidery was retailed over the course of the eighteenth century reflects the profound changes in consumption habits during this period. Elite consumers, whilst bound by notions of courtly etiquette, were also avid followers of the latest fashionable trends. The embroidery trade thus adapted to accommodate the varied needs and desires of its elite clientele, expanding into new distribution channels in collaboration with the Paris *marchands merciers* and experimenting with material marketing in the form of samples. The networks formed between embroiderers and merchants in towns and cities across France and elsewhere in Europe, along with improvements in infrastructure and transport, enabled the relatively easy flow of samples. The use of samples in turn allowed embroiderers to gain access to a wider market, and for the

¹⁰⁹ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, p. 67.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹¹ Although Lemire suggests that quilted petticoats displayed a ‘basic competence in execution’, she also notes that those with exquisite embroidery were the exception. *Ibid.*

embroidery trade to operate on both a national and international scale. Furthermore, it is through an examination of retailing, distribution and marketing that the interdependency of Paris and Lyon becomes more apparent. Whilst the previous chapter challenged the primacy of Paris as a leader of taste and fashion during this period, this chapter has demonstrated the tangible ways through which Lyon was able to assert its position as a major supplier of fashionable embroidery to the capital and across Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. Capitalising on its reputation for supplying high-quality and fashionable silks to the French court, as well as its flexibility as a 'free trade', Lyon embroidery was well-suited to the Parisian luxury market which demanded a constant flow of a wide variety of fashionable goods. Finally, a tension between the elite consumer's desire for novelty and variety, and their need for distinction was met through the distribution of ready-embroidered panels. These panels, it has been argued, were able to satisfy consumer demand for variety, speed of purchase, and distinction through their unique position between 'ready-made' and 'made to measure'.

CHAPTER 4

The Guild Question: Paris and Lyon

Introduction

In 1770, Saint-Aubin prefaced his treatise of embroidery with a brief history of the Paris guild of embroiderers, noting that their statutes had varied over the course of its 500-year history ‘according to fashion and circumstance’.¹ The previous chapters demonstrated that the ways in which embroidery was consumed, designed and retailed underwent a significant change over the course of the eighteenth century. They argued that embroidery was a flexible luxury product which evolved to meet the diverging needs and desires of its heterogeneous elite clientele. This chapter considers the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century Paris and Lyon within the context of the guild system. Absent from Saint-Aubin’s introduction is the institutional complexity within which the embroidery trade operated. Upon first reading of *L’Art du brodeur*, one could be forgiven for assuming that Paris was the centre of embroidery production in France. The previous chapters demonstrated that on the contrary, Lyon was also a major producer of embroidery by the time of *L’Art du brodeur*’s publication, and rivalled Paris in the stakes for fashion leadership. Furthermore, in foregrounding the Paris guild of embroiderers, Saint-Aubin – perhaps unintentionally – led the reader to believe that it regulated the trade nationally. This was not the case: the trade in Lyon operated beyond the jurisdiction of the Paris guild of embroiderers.

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the guild-regulated aspects of the trade in Paris and the non-guild context of Lyon. In particular, it investigates the jurisdictional parameters within which the professional embroiderers operated and the extent to which the guild in Paris was able to adapt effectively to the changing ‘fashion and circumstance’ surrounding its trade. Revisionist scholarship on guild history in recent years has focused on the redeeming aspects of guilds, expounding the contribution of the guild system to the social and economic progress of France during the eighteenth

¹ ‘suivant les modes & les circonstances’. Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), p. 4. Hereafter *L’Art du brodeur*.

century.² Furthermore, studies on individual trades have shown that in the changing context of a growing consumer society, some guilds took proactive measures to adapt to such an environment, and to ensure their competitiveness and survival.³ Whilst this was true for some of the larger trades, this chapter offers another perspective which suggests that the Paris guild of embroiderers was retrospectively reactionary to the changing market for embroidery, and was limited in its power to control the evolving nature of its trade. Further still, the success of embroidered products from Lyon, where the trade was not regulated by a guild, questions the extent to which the guild system was an adequate institutional framework for supplying an increasing consumer demand for fashionable embellishments during the second half of the century.

As we have seen, by the mid-eighteenth century there was a dual market for embroidery which produced not only the elaborate gold and silver embroidery for formal court clothing, but more fashionable products such as waistcoats embroidered in a variety of brightly-coloured silk designs. Whilst the Paris guild served the market for embroidery in its most traditional form, this chapter will demonstrate that its administrative structure did not have the necessary flexibility to meet consumer demand for the ‘new’ fashionable embroidery sold in the shops of the *marchands merciers* by the late eighteenth century. This

² See S. R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, eds, *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Epstein, ‘Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Pre-Industrial Europe’, in *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, pp. 684-713; Michael P. Fitzsimmons, *From Artisan to Worker: Guilds, the French State, and the Organization of Labor, 1776-1821* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Steven L. Kaplan, ‘The Luxury Guilds in Paris in the 18th Century’, *Francia*, 9 (1981), 257-98; Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question 1700-1775* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Michael Sonenscher, ‘Journeyman, the Courts and the French Trades 1781-1791’, *Past & Present*, 114 (1987), 77-109; Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sonenscher, ‘Work and Wages in Paris in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Manufacture in Town and Country before the Factory*, ed. by Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson and Sonenscher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 147-72.

³ See for example: Giorgio Riello, *A Foot in the Past: Consumers, Producers and Footwear in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

is further evidenced by two major restructures that the guild underwent in 1776 and 1784. By offering the case of Lyon as a comparator, this chapter demonstrates that a guild was not necessarily the most effective production framework for meeting a new consumer demand for fashionable embroidered clothing. Rather, it was the very nature of Lyon's non-guild status which contributed to its rise as a leader of fashionable embroidery during the late eighteenth century.

This chapter firstly examines the context of the guild system in eighteenth-century France. This will provide a foundation for presenting the history of the Paris guild of embroiderers during the period 1718-91 and the internal hierarchy found within the guild. This chapter will then examine the function of the administrative statutes of the guild, and how these affected the embroiderers' competitiveness in the luxury markets of eighteenth-century Paris. This examination will be followed by an analysis of how the Paris guild controlled apprenticeship and training, an important consideration within the context of a changing market for embroidery. The position of the Paris guild will then be considered within the hierarchy of urban trades, before analysing the effects of the restructures of 1776 and 1784. This section will be followed by a comparative analysis of the trade in Lyon, examining how the trade and apprenticeship were structured in the absence of a guild in this town. This chapter will finally situate the Lyon embroiderers and their trade within the wider context of the Lyon silk-weaving guild, the *Grand Fabrique*, examining how the fashion for silk embroidery from Lyon led to an attempt by the *Grand Fabrique* to bring certain aspects of embroidery under its control.⁴

4.1 The Guild System of Eighteenth-Century France

The guild system in France was strengthened by the 1665 appointment of Louis XIV's finance minister, Jean Baptiste Colbert, who set forth a vision of a centrally-regulated

⁴ One of the main methodological challenges for comparing the guild and non-guild aspects of the embroidery trade is the fragmentary nature of the surviving sources. The sources used for this chapter are therefore drawn from a wide variety of available documents. In Paris, the majority of official guild records were destroyed by a fire at the Hôtel de Ville in 1871. What records do survive are mostly in manuscript form and are located sporadically across a number of different series in the Archives nationales. Few embroiderer apprenticeship contracts for both Paris and Lyon have been found, so apprenticeship is investigated through a variety of sources, such as the Paris guild statutes and apprenticeship disputes in Lyon.

guild structure which was to police the quality of workmanship and the organisation of production of the French trades. With a view to promoting the growth of domestic industry and commerce, Colbert's system was characterised by inspections, regulations, and state interventions, and its purpose was to stimulate the French economy and protect consumers from poor-quality products, both at home and abroad. Colbert achieved this objective primarily by standardising the regulations of production across the country and introducing a new system of inspection visits to enforce these rules, which were carried out by appointed inspectors of manufacture.⁵

The system met with resistance from the guilds, however, who until Colbert's edicts had operated in a decentralised manner and believed that the new bureaucratic state intervention would stifle innovation and their commercial activities. Nevertheless, the work of Philippe Minard has shown that these tensions were not as straightforward as hitherto thought, and that Colbertism rather encouraged an increased confidence between buyer and seller. The new system of inspection and benchmarking of quality in the textile industries guaranteed a certain level of quality and thus limited market uncertainty. This level of trust in the marketplace which had been generated by Colbert's measures actually made trading easier and stimulated commerce. As a result, contemporary agents of commerce and manufacture, such as merchants and guild masters, were not as opposed to Colbertism as is sometimes thought.⁶

The guild system as it had been under Colbert continued until the second half of the eighteenth century, when Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (controller general of finances,

⁵ For the scholarship on Colbert, see for example: Glenn Joseph Ames, *Colbert, Mercantilism, and the French Quest for Asian Trade* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016); Henry C. Clark, *Compass of Society: Commerce and Absolutism in Old-Regime France* (Lanham and London: Lexington, 2007); Charles Woolsey Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939); Woolsey Cole, *French Mercantilism, 1683-1700* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Daniel Dessert, *Le royaume de monsieur Colbert, 1661-1683* (Paris: Perrin, 2007); Jean Meyer, *Colbert* (Paris: Hachette, 1981); Philippe Minard, *La fortune du colbertisme: État et industrie dans la France des Lumières* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Minard, 'Colbertism Continued? The Inspectorate of Manufactures and Strategies of Exchange in Eighteenth-Century France', *French Historical Studies*, 23/3 (2000), 477-96; Aimé Richardt, *Colbert et le Colbertisme* (Paris: Tallandier, 1997); Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *Colbert: La politique du bon sens* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2003).

⁶ Minard, *La fortune du colbertisme*; Minard, 'Colbertism Continued? The Inspectorate of Manufactures and Strategies of Exchange in Eighteenth-Century France', p. 488.

1774-76) attempted to abolish the guild structure and its system of privileges in 1776. Turgot proposed that changing market conditions and growing consumer demand during this period necessitated a new economic regulatory framework, and as a result, the guild system should be eradicated.⁷ Turgot's edict was met with fierce opposition however, particularly from those who recognised the benefits of Colbert's policing system to the market. They did not envisage how Turgot's proposition for non-guild regulated industry could foster the same levels of quality and therefore trust between producer and consumer. For them, Turgot's vision simply did not match the economic realities of the commercial marketplace. The result was thus a more measured restructure of the guilds, where related trades were joined together in merged guilds in an attempt to respond to the changing market conditions of the late eighteenth century. It was not until 1791 that guilds were abolished in France completely.

4.2 The Paris Guild of Embroiderers

4.2.1 Internal Structure

The guild of *Brodeurs, Découpeurs, Egratigneurs, Chasubliers* was established in Paris in 1272 and regulated the embroidery trade in Paris until 1791. Structurally, the guild in Paris was extremely nepotistic, patriarchal and hierarchical. The statutes stipulated for example, that only sons and daughters of master embroiderers could assist in their work, thus ensuring the employment of a household and retaining relative control, in theory, over the evolving

⁷ For the scholarship on Turgot, see for example: A. Clement, 'La politique sociale de Turgot: entre libéralisme et interventionnisme', *L'Actualité économique: Organe officiel de l'association des licenciés de l'école des hautes études commerciales de Montréal*, 81/4 (2005), 725-46; H. Defalvard, 'Valeur et contrats à la lumière de Turgot (1769)', *Revue économique*, 49/6 (1998), 1573-600; Edgar Faure, *La disgrâce de Turgot, 12 Mai 1776* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961); P. Fontaine, 'Turgot's "Institutional Individualism"', *History of Political Economy*, 29/1 (1997), 1-20; Peter Groenewegen, *Eighteenth-Century Economics: Turgot, Beccaria and Smith and their Contemporaries* (London: Routledge, 2002); Claude Morilhat, *La prise de conscience du capitalisme: Économie et philosophie chez Turgot* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988).

nature of the occupation.⁸ Moreover, women were excluded from the mastership for most of the eighteenth century and the guild dictated that women were not permitted to run embroidery workshops or to take on apprentices independently.⁹ Master embroiderers were ordered into a hierarchy based on experience, with an internal system distinguishing three distinct categories: the *anciens*, who had 30 years of experience, the *modernes* who had 20, and the *jeunes* who had 10.¹⁰ In terms of everyday regulation, the statutes of the guild were strictly enforced by a board of four *jurés*. These were experienced members of the guild who were elected into such positions in order to preserve the quality of production, as well as police the training of the next generation of professional embroiderers. To be elected a *juré*, one had to be both currently employed in the profession and have been a member of the guild for at least 10 years, meaning at least 16 years of experience if one is to count the six-year apprenticeship training that an embroiderer was required to complete before entering the guild. In his work on internal disputes between masters in the guilds of eighteenth-century Paris, Kaplan refers to the *jurés* as the ‘ruling elite’, a replication of aristocratic rule within the guild system which denied masters of the lower rank full participation in the corporate management of the profession.¹¹ Certainly, the *jurés* of the embroidery guild sought to retain internal control and ensured its members adhered to corporate regulation through a series of general bi-annual visits made by the *jurés* to all master embroiderers, as well as their widows. These inspections were supplemented by further visits which were decided upon at the discretion of the *jurés*. Master embroiderers and their widows were expected to fully comply with these visits and during each of the general visits they were required to pay

⁸ The statutes do not specify in what capacity sons and daughters were to be employed, but speculation would suggest that unless they were apprentices, they would be tasked with the menial duties of setting up the frame for embroidery and preparing fabric and materials.

⁹ Widows were permitted to carry on their husband’s business after his death, but were not permitted to take on new apprentices. The importance of women as non-guild workers in the embroidery trade is examined in Chapter 5.

¹⁰ Jacques Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce, contenant tout ce qui concerne le commerce qui se fait dans les quatre parties du monde, ouvrage posthume du Sr Jacques Savary des Bruslons continué et donné au public, par Philémon-Louis Savary* (Genève: les héritiers Cramer et les frères Philibert, 1744), I, p. 560.

¹¹ Kaplan, ‘The Character and Implications of Strife among the Masters inside the Guilds of Eighteenth-Century Paris’, *Journal of Social History*, 19/4 (1986), 631-47.

35 *sols* for ‘pension arrears owed by the guild’ (reduced to five *sols* thereafter upon settlement of the debt, a charge which was stipulated by the crown according to its ranking in the hierarchy of trades).¹²

The notions of hierarchy found within the institutional structure of the guild further governed the daily occupation of embroidery, and this is demonstrated by the number of occupational titles that existed among the embroiderers. There were at least 12 terms for embroiderer (*brodeur*) in official use during the eighteenth century, ranging from what would have been presumably the lowest ranked and most general embroiderer (*brodeur*) and journeyman embroiderer (*compagnon brodeur*), to master embroiderer (*maître brodeur*), master vestment embroiderer (*maître brodeur chasublier*), master merchant embroiderer (*maître brodeur marchand*), right through to privileged embroiderer to the king (*brodeur privilégié du Roi*). The co-existence of these titles reflects not only the variety of specialisations found amongst the embroiderers, but also to some extent the product variety of the trade.

These titles also demarcate the embroiderers’ place in the ‘hierarchy of skills’ found within the occupation. For example, the difference between embroiderer and journeyman embroiderer and master embroiderer was first and foremost, administrative. The suffix of master was afforded to those who had passed the mastership and paid the required fee: 135 *livres* for sons of masters and 300 for those without kinship.¹³ This was a considerable sum in the eighteenth century and along with the items required to set up a workshop, such as embroidery frames, needles, and candles for lighting, mastership was not an obtainable goal for most. Generally speaking, the masters were considerably more experienced and qualified than the ordinary embroiderers and journeymen. In order to obtain mastership and the title of master embroiderer, like most craft professions during this period, embroiderers were required to complete their apprenticeship and complete a *chef-d’œuvre*, or masterpiece, which showcased their competency as an artisan and their six years of training as an apprentice. Those wishing to obtain a mastership were required to embroider ‘Half a third of a face in shaded gold in a square and four fleurs-de-lis in Milan

¹² ‘arrérages des rentes dûes par la Communauté’. *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris, 1718* (Paris: impr. de Valleyre, 1758), Article 20, p. 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Article 6, p. 13.

gold.¹⁴ Saint-Aubin explains that this type of embroidery (shaded gold) was one of the most skilful, time-consuming and expensive forms of embroidery that an embroiderer could undertake.¹⁵ Furthermore, in Jacques Savary des Bruslons's *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* (second edition, 1744), we are told that such a masterpiece would take two months to complete, a clear indication of the extremely high standards set by the guild.¹⁶ Unlike the upholsterers (*tapisiers*) and lace-makers (*passementiers*), the exact requirements of an embroidery mastership were clearly defined in the guild statutes. For these rival guilds, members were simply told of the need to complete a masterpiece in order to obtain mastership. The presence of such detail written into the guild statutes points to how strictly the guild attempted to manage its members and goes some way to explaining the complex hierarchy of trades found within the broader occupation.

Moreover, the author of the *Dictionnaire raisonné universel des arts et métiers* (1773) distinguished the master embroiderers by the nature of their work, implying their high level of skill as follows: 'The cutting of material, edgings in cord, chenille and knots, representations of faces naturally drawn and shaded, are the domain of master embroiderers, & it falls only to them to make these works for the public.'¹⁷ In supplying embroidery to the 'public', the author alludes to the prominence of their work and that the most skilled work was reserved for the masters. This perceived difference in skill between the embroiderers, journeymen, and master embroiderers is further demonstrated by their place in the occupational hierarchy and, theoretically, determined the organisation of work in the trade. For instance, an embroiderer and journeyman embroiderer would have worked for a master embroiderer who in turn would have distributed work, materials and equipment (spindles, bobbins, trim containers, candlesticks, heat and water) to the

¹⁴ 'une figure d'or nuée d'un demi-tiers en carré, & l'expérience de quatre fleurs de Lys d'or de Milan.' Ibid., Article 5, p. 13.

¹⁵ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 13.

¹⁶ Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel*, p. 560.

¹⁷ 'Les découpures d'étoffes, les lisérages de cordonnet, de chenille & de nœuds, les représentations des figures dessinées & nuées au naturel, sont du district des maîtres brodeurs, & il n'appartient qu'à eux de les faire pour le public.' Pierre Jaubert, *Dictionnaire raisonné universel des arts et métiers: contenant l'histoire, la description, la police des fabriques et manufactures et des pays étrangers: ouvrage utile à tous les citoyens* (Paris: P. Fr. Didot jeune, 1773), II, p. 404. Saint-Aubin described the 'brodeurs découpeurs' as those who specialised in the cutting of vellum or paper used to create the raised shapes in guipure embroidery. See Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, pp. 34-5.

former.¹⁸ Once the master embroiderers had been received into the guild, their role was mainly to direct the work of their apprentices and workers, and to deal with the day-to-day commercial activities of their workshop.¹⁹

Privileged embroiderers to the king enjoyed even higher status and control than a master. Their unique position enabled them to take workers away from the master embroiderers when necessary for their own work.²⁰ Embroiderers to the king were evidently distinguished by the prestigious nature of their work in supplying embroidery to the royal household and this was reflected in the prices they charged. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Louis Jacques Balzac, privileged embroiderer to the king, charged exceptionally high prices, embroidering a velvet coat for an aristocratic customer in silver and chenille for the price of 800 *livres* in January 1760, a mere snip compared to the 2,250 *livres* he charged for an embroidered coat just a few days later on 31 January 1760.²¹

4.2.2 Administrative Statutes

The published statutes of the guilds were an important feature of the jurisdictional framework within which the guilds of eighteenth-century France operated. Statutes were updated and modified as was deemed necessary by both the guilds themselves and the crown. Saint-Aubin's statement, that the Paris guild's statutes had varied throughout its history 'according to fashion and circumstance', is important to our understanding of how the guild attempted to use its statutes to adapt to a changing market.²² The guild renewed its statutes in the *parlement* in 1649 and for a final time as the guild of *Brodeurs, Découpeurs, Egratigneurs, Chasubliers* in 1718.²³ Whilst the final set of statutes was registered and approved in 1718, they were first submitted by the *jurés* of the guild in 1699 and subsequently underwent 10 stages of approval over almost two decades.

¹⁸ See Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁹ The business practices of the embroiderers are examined in Chapter 5.

²⁰ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, pp. 4-5.

²¹ ADP D5/B6/reg.699: 'Louis Jacques Balzac, Registre des Livraisons d'Ouvrages Commencé le 1er Janvier 1760', 25 June 1763, p. 3.

²² 'Leurs Statuts ont varié suivant les modes & les circonstances'. Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 4.

²³ *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris, 1718.*

In 1699, the guild cited its motivation for renewing its statutes for the following principal reasons. Firstly, that the length of time that had passed since it last registered a renewed set of statutes in 1649 had led to infringements by other artisans on its monopoly of production, a common reality of the guild system. Secondly, and most importantly, that its work had changed, that to old designs it was now adding new ‘inventions’.²⁴ The guild of *Brodeurs, Découpeurs, Egratigneurs, Chasubliers* thus set forth 46 articles to address these concerns and to protect their production rights.²⁵ Whilst the 1649 statutes no longer exist to enable a direct comparison with those from 1718, it is possible to ascertain, to a limited extent, what these changes were from other sources.²⁶ The entry for *Brodeur* in Savary des Bruslons’ *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* is particularly useful for this purpose. Savary des Bruslons passed away in 1716, leaving the *Dictionnaire* unfinished at the time of his death; a first edition was then completed and published posthumously in 1723 by his brother, Louis-Philémon Savary. Savary did not update the entry for *Brodeur* after his brother’s death and in light of the latest guild statutes which would have been available in late 1718. Rather, Savary’s main source of information for the embroidery trade for the *Dictionnaire* continued to be the statutes from 1649. Thanks to Savary’s *Dictionnaire*, we firstly know that in 1649 the guild of embroiderers was subject to 58 statutes, rather than the 46 which were finalised by 1718. Of the 58 statutes in 1649, 30 of these were administrative and set forth the regulations concerning the election of *jurés*, inspections, mastership and apprenticeship. The remaining 28 were concerned with the different types of work that the embroiderers were entitled to carry out, embroidery technique, and materials.²⁷ In contrast, 20 of the 46 statutes registered in 1718 governed administrative matters of the guild, whilst 26 concerned issues of embroidery production and technique.

The guild therefore recognised that fluctuations of fashion and consumer demand had a tangible effect on its trade and the products which it produced and that it was necessary to adapt alongside ‘fashion’ in order to survive. New forms of embroidery were recognised in the guild statutes which were published in 1718. Since there was limited technological innovation in embroidery during this period, the *inventions* that the guild alluded to in its statutes were likely to be new designs, styles or materials, rather than a

²⁴ ‘inventions’. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The 1649 statutes are likely to have been destroyed in the Hotel de Ville fire of 1871, along with the rest of the guild archives, and do not exist elsewhere.

²⁷ Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel*, p. 560.

dramatic change in production techniques. The steps taken by the guild to have new forms of embroidery recognised in its regulations thus demonstrate that the guild was conscious of the need to keep up with consumer demand and defend its production rights from competitor trades. Yet a reading of the production-related statutes suggests that the guild in Paris was very much concerned with embroidery which was produced for both the court and Church, indicating that the guild in Paris regulated embroidery in its most traditional form. Indeed, most of the production-related statutes regulated the use of appropriate materials in embroidery, and these were the expensive materials required of the sartorial etiquette of the court, such as gold and silver.

In the opening statement of its appeal to renew its statutes, the guild identified its trade as ‘very useful to the Public and much distinguished by the price of the materials it uses, and by the variety of decoration that it adds, not only to their own work, but also to the work of others’.²⁸ This declaration is indicative of the variety of products that professional embroiderers embellished, and Saint-Aubin echoes this with the 24 different types of embroidery which he describes in *L’Art du brodeur*.²⁹ The above statement further distinguished the trade as one which added value to the work of other trades. For example, an embroiderer would have added decoration to a suit cut and sewn by a tailor, a dress made by a seamstress, or seat covers to be made by an upholsterer.³⁰ Yet the nature of the embroiderers’ work also points to a certain ambiguity in the ownership of production which was prevalent in the luxury trades during this period. Such ambiguity was one of the main causes of conflicts between guilds recorded in Paris during the eighteenth century.

Business survival and the protection of market rights were key preoccupations of the guild of embroiderers during this period. The proliferation of competitor trades which threatened to encroach on its segment of the market was a daily concern and is reflected in its statutes. The embroiderers named the tailors (*tailleurs*), saddlers (*selliers*), upholsterers (*tapissiers*), belt-makers (*ceinturiers*), glove-makers (*gantiers*), lace/braid-makers (*passementiers*), and button-makers (*boutonniers*) as particular threats, expressly forbidding

²⁸ ‘leur Métier est très-utile au Public & très-distingué par le prix des matieres qu’ils employent, & par la diversité des ornements qu’ils ajoutent, tant à leurs propres ouvrages, qu’aux ouvrages des autres’. *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris., 1718*, p. 4.

²⁹ Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*.

³⁰ The subcontracting networks of the embroidery trade are analysed in Chapter 5.

them in Article 17 from carrying out any work which would normally be the domain of the embroiderers on pain of a 10 *livres* fine. Not only were other trades forbidden from practising embroidery, but the embroiderers themselves were prohibited from working with or on the premises of ‘Master Upholsterers and all other artisans of whatever quality they may be’.³¹ Although collaboration between different trades during this period was necessary, the boundaries could easily become blurred.³² Indeed ‘all other artisans’ were warned against treading on the toes of the embroiderers in the same article, but the specific references to the above trades give us a good idea of the nature of the competition and the market in which the embroiderers were operating.

4.2.3 Regulating Apprenticeship and Training

The control that the guild in Paris sought to retain over who could work as an embroiderer is further emphasised by the route of entry into embroidery. According to Statute 4, it was only once the number of master embroiderers had fallen to 200 that a master embroiderer was permitted to employ an apprentice. Further still, a new apprentice could only be taken on once 10 years had passed since the day their predecessor had been employed. According to Savary des Bruslons’ *Dictionnaire universel de commerce*, it is probable that this regulation was also present in the 1649 statutes. Savary, whose source of information for the embroiderers was their 1649 statutes, simply stated that the guild of embroiderers must not exceed 200 masters, with no mention of this being a condition of apprenticeship, but it is unclear as to why this would not apply also in 1649. Indeed, Savary goes on to speak of embroidery apprenticeship in more detail, writing that only sons of masters or journeymen could be employed as apprentices, that after having completed an apprenticeship, they must serve three years under a master before being considered for mastership, and that no one would be considered for a mastership before the age of 20 years.³³ These stipulations are absent from the 1718 statutes. Assuming that Savary took this information from the 1649 statutes alone, it

³¹ ‘les Maîtres Tapissiers & autres Artisans de quelque qualité qu’ils soient’. *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris, 1718*, p. 15.

³² This was also a reality of subcontracting, a common way of organising production during the eighteenth century. Subcontracting in the embroidery trade is analysed in Chapter 5.

³³ Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel*, p. 560.

would appear that embroidery apprenticeship became less strict with the introduction of the 1718 statutes.

Statute 4 of the 1718 document had an important significance for the embroidery market in the eighteenth century. Whilst its main purpose was to regulate the number of workers employed in embroidery at any one time, it also indicated the size of the market and the fluctuations in fashion to which the trade was subject, as well as how embroidery was perceived during this period. Certainly, the regulation seemed to be much stricter than other guilds, the reasons for which can be suggested are as follows.³⁴ Firstly, that both the guild and crown sought to promote the trade as being one of prestige and high status. By creating a sense of unattainability around the occupation, the guild restricted access to their market, and also ensured that those who did enter the trade were committed to the embroiderers' ethos of quality. Furthermore, the wearing of embroidery during the early modern period was prohibited to all but the highest rank of nobility by a decree passed in 1660.³⁵ Controlling the number of workers within the trade, and thus the amount of embroidery produced, could be seen as one way in which the royal government attempted to enforce sumptuary law and limit the consumption of embroidery by the lower ranks of society. However, and as we have seen, such laws had largely fallen out of favour by the mid-eighteenth century and were ineffective at controlling the consumption of luxury goods.³⁶

Furthermore and more importantly, the market for embroidery was evolving in new ways. The guild in Paris recognised this when it began the process of registering a set of modified statutes as early as 1699. The new statutes were intended to protect the embroidery trade from infringements on its production rights by competitor trades, and thus paid particular attention to the statutes which concerned production technique and materials. Nevertheless, this preoccupation with production rights and the failure of the guild to change its internal administrative structure sufficiently was just as damaging to the trade as competition with other guilds. The number of administrative statutes registered in 1718 had decreased in relation to production-related statutes since 1649. Yet

³⁴ An examination of the statutes of competitor guilds such as the upholsterers and lace-makers indicate no similar regulations.

³⁵ *Déclaration... portant règlement sur le fait tant des passemens d'or et d'argent, dorures des carrosses, chaises et calèches, que passemens, dentelles, broderies, guipures et autres choses semblables, concernant la parure des vestemens... Registrée en Parlement le 13... décembre* (Paris, 1660).

³⁶ See Chapter 1.

the decision to keep certain regulations, particularly the strict rules surrounding apprenticeship, could be seen as a symptom of a trade reacting slowly to changing market conditions. Rather than protecting their trade, the rigorous apprenticeship regulations, combined with the long term of apprenticeship required (six years), did little to discourage outsiders from practising embroidery.³⁷ Instead, workers turned to the privileged areas (*fauxbourgs privilégiés*) which were areas in Paris where workers had been granted the right to work freely, without being subject to guild regulations and inspections.³⁸

By the mid-eighteenth century, Statute 4 which regulated the ratio of masters to apprentices had been abandoned all together. On 31 July 1757, a new edict was issued lifting the restrictions on embroidery apprenticeship, thus enabling master embroiderers to employ an apprentice without regard for the number of masters within the guild. Master embroiderers were now also allowed to take on apprentices without a minimum number of years as a master themselves, and new apprentices could be employed just one year after their predecessor, rather than 10 years.³⁹ Furthermore, the 1757 edict states that the changes to embroidery apprenticeship were necessary in order to naturally regulate the proportion of workers to the amount of work available, thus suggesting that consumer demand for embroidery was not being adequately met by the guild-regulated trade.⁴⁰ The new flexibility granted by the edict of 1757 was thus one attempt to enable the guild-regulated embroidery trade to compete effectively in a fluctuating market and keep up with consumer demand.

³⁷ The apprenticeship itself was six years long, a comparable term with related trades such as the upholsterers who also trained for six years and the lace-makers who trained for five. In contrast to the trades which were in the business of embellishment, then, the trades which were involved in the actual manufacture of the materials which they decorated insisted upon a considerably longer apprenticeship. Silk weavers, for example, were required to train for ten years as an apprentice. For those involved in the making up of the garments, the apprenticeship was much shorter; tailor apprenticeships were a minimum of just three years.

³⁸ The privileged areas and its workers are examined in Chapter 5.

³⁹ *Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat du Roi, qui contient règlement concernant les apprentissages du métier de Brodeur. Extrait des registres du Conseil d'Etat* (Paris: Impr. Royale, 1758), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

4.2.4 Restructuring the Paris Guild

During the eighteenth century, the Paris guild underwent numerous structural changes, with its place within the guild system fluctuating considerably over the course of the century. There was a demonstrable hierarchy of guilds during this period which was organised according to size, longevity and relationship with the crown. The guilds which were most powerful during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were the *Six Corps*. The *Six Corps* included the drapers (*drapiers*), grocers (*épiciers*), haberdashery-merchants (*merciers*), furriers (*fourreurs*), bonnet-makers (*bonnetiers*) and goldsmiths (*orfèvres*), and was the wealthiest group of guilds which was able to exert considerable influence, particularly when it came to legal disputes between competitor guilds.⁴¹ Below the *Six Corps* were guilds such as the upholsterers (*tapisseries*), cabinet-makers (*menuisiers-ébénistes*) and gilders (*doreurs*).

As a guild which specialised in the decoration of luxury objects, it would be sensible to venture that the embroiderers occupied a similar place to these latter in the hierarchy of guilds. However, an *Edit du Roy* from March 1691 indicates that their place in the institutional order was, in fact, much lower. In this document, the royal government classified the *arts et métiers* in Paris into four distinct categories. Whilst the *Six Corps* and upholsterers appeared in the first class, the embroiderers were placed in the fourth (and lowest) class alongside trades such as the button-makers (*boutonniers*), ribbon-makers (*rubanniers*) and paper-makers (*papetiers*). According to the categories, the embroiderers were considered lower in the urban hierarchy of trades than the tailors (*tailleurs*), seamstresses (*couturiers*) and fan-makers (*éventaillistes*) who were placed in the third class; and the belt-makers (*ceinturiers*), glove-makers (*gantiers*) and saddlers (*selliers*) who ranked in the second class. It is possible that the embroiderers were ranked in the lowest category because they were in the business of embellishment. Rather than making up an entire

⁴¹ For the scholarship on guilds and guild disputes in France, see for example: Gail Bossenga, 'Protecting Merchants: Guilds and Commercial Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France', *French Historical Studies*, 15/4 (1988), 693-703; Émile Coornaert, *Les corporations de France avant 1789* (Paris: Les Éditions ouvrières, 1968); Crowston, 'Engendering the Guilds: Seamstresses, Tailors, and the Clash of Corporate Identities in Old Regime France', *French Historical Studies*, 23/2 (2000), 339-72; Kaplan, 'The Luxury Guilds in Paris in the 18th Century'; Kaplan, 'The Character and Implications of Strife among the Masters inside the Guilds of Eighteenth-Century Paris'; Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France*; Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*.

item, the embroiderers added decoration to products which had been made by another artisan, for example a suit or dress made by a tailor. Nevertheless, their low ranking is surprising when we consider the expensive materials with which the embroiderers worked and the high prices which their products commanded.

The edict stated that a new system of ordering the guilds was necessary to maintain good order and an effective policing system, but also to ensure that guild apprenticeships and masterpieces met an approved level of quality. However, the purpose of this categorisation was primarily financial, with the edict stating that there was a need to regulate the level of revenue and taxes that the guilds paid to the crown in order to avoid financial corruption among the higher ranks of the guilds, but most importantly, to fund the French army. Indeed, the 1691 edict came at a crucial point during the Nine Years' War for France, with Louis XIV in need of revenue to finance the Siege of Mons. As such, the edict set forth the costs that guilds and their members were required to pay to the crown for various guild-related activities such as inspection visits, apprenticeships, and the reception of new masters. Each activity was subject to a fee, the amount of which was set according to category. For example, to become a master in a guild of the first class, a fee of 15 *livres* was required; in the second, 12 *livres*; in the third, 9 *livres*, and in the fourth class, 5 *livres*. At the end of the seventeenth century, the guild of embroiderers was therefore considered a guild of small financial means, suggesting that it had limited financial and political power in comparison to those in the first category of guilds, such as the *Six Corps* and upholsterers.

Indeed, the accounts of the guild indicate that it was one of modest means throughout the eighteenth century.⁴² In order to better control guild finances, the royal government set up a commission in 1716 to examine the financial activities of the guilds. These audits took place over the period 1717-88.⁴³ The embroiderers' accounts were audited at regular intervals between 1767 and 1784 (every two to four years). These audits provide a useful overview of the income and expenditure of the guild for the period 1745-84. The accounts demonstrate that income always exceeded expenditure, suggesting that on the whole, the finances of the guild were well managed. Moreover, these audits show that guild accounts were subject to detailed scrutiny. Some payments were reduced where they were deemed unnecessary or excessive. For example in 1784, the cost of 48 *livres*

⁴² AN V/7/423: 'Commissions extraordinaires du Conseil, Jugements des comptes des jurés-syndics de chaque communauté 1716-90, "Brodeurs"', 1723-89.

⁴³ Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, p. 287.

recorded by the guild for legal fees in a dispute was deemed an unauthorised expense and ordered to be removed from the accounts.

The accounts show that the income of the guild over these years varied from as little as 2,036 *livres* in 1776-77 to 23,321 *livres* 7 *sols* 2 *deniers* for the previous period, 1774-75. Outside of these exceptions, it seems that the guild received on average between 3,000 and 16,000 *livres* per annum, a still varied range. This income was made up of guild admission fees, inspection fees paid to the *jurés*, damages won in legal disputes and other sources not specified in these accounts. In her research on the Paris guild of seamstresses, Crowston has noted that guild admissions, which provided a steady source of income for most guilds, noticeably reduced for the seamstresses during times of political and economic crises, such as the Paris grain shortages in the 1740s and 1770s.⁴⁴ However, an examination of the embroiderers' accounts for the 1770s suggests that the embroiderers enjoyed the most prosperity during these years until 1776. Since the accounts do not consistently record all the sources from which their income came in each year, it is possible that the embroiderers sought other ways in which to increase their revenue and mitigate the effects of external economic factors, such as the grain shortages. Indeed, an analysis of admission to the guild during these years suggests that admission fees were not necessarily the guild's main source of revenue. For example, during the guild's most prosperous year (1774-75), 27 were admitted to the mastership, yet the following year, when the guild earned just 2,036 *livres*, there were 30 admissions to the guild.⁴⁵

The exceptionally low income of the guild in 1776-77 coincided with the temporary abolition of the guild system.⁴⁶ In 1776, the guild system underwent a nationwide restructure in response to the increasing pressure on the nation's artisans and manufacturers to meet demand for an ever-growing variety of consumer goods. As a consequence, the Paris guild of embroiderers was joined with the lace-makers and button-makers to form the new guild of *Passementiers-Brodeurs*. This marked the declining influence of the guild on the commercial activities of professional embroiderers in Paris and coincided with the fashion for embroidered textiles, the popularity of which was gaining significant ground in the 1770s. From 1777 onwards and after the restructure, guild

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 327-28.

⁴⁵ AN Y 9393b; AN Y 9394a: 'Avis du procureur du roi sur des contestations entre ouvriers et maîtres des métiers de Paris. Bons de maîtrises et de jurandes', 1681-1790.

⁴⁶ Crowston has noted that this also contributed to a marked decline in admissions to the Paris guild of seamstresses in 1776. See *ibid.*, p. 327.

finances were slow to pick up and the guild did not reach its pre-1776 levels of income until 1781-82, when its income doubled from 4,660 *livres* to 10,119 *livres*. During 1781-82, the guild received 2,200 *livres* in admission fees. Evidence from elsewhere in the archives indicate that 29 people were admitted to the guild in that year.⁴⁷ Yet as already suggested, it is unlikely that the guild relied on admission fees as their main source of revenue, and the sudden increase in income could have been due to new taxes imposed on their masters or new sources of investment.⁴⁸

The guild was restructured again by the royal government in 1784 to join together with the *Marchands Fabricans d'étoffes* and *Tissutiers-Rubanniers*, forming the guild of *Fabricans d'étoffes-Tissutiers-Passementiers-Brodeurs*.⁴⁹ This third restructure, registered in *parlement* on 20 August 1784, marks a significant point in the history of the guild-regulated embroidery trade in Paris. In joining the guild of *Marchands Fabricans d'étoffes*, the embroiderers were joining one of the *Six Corps*, an important and major step in the progress of the embroiderers within the hierarchy of urban trades. Over the course of almost a century, then, the guild had risen from the lowest category to the highest, marking a significant leap in social, political and economic power; at least, symbolically.

The new association with the *Marchands Fabricans d'étoffes* afforded guild members the same rights as the original *Six Corps* members, enabling the embroiderers, in principle, to access 'the privileges and the power new branches of industry afford'.⁵⁰ Such ideology reflected the commercial ambitions of the royal government at the time, but did not necessarily guarantee the best interests of the embroiderers. Indeed, such a partnership meant that the benefits transferred both ways. The *Marchands Fabricans d'étoffes*, a group with significantly stronger financial and political power than the embroiderers, now had access to a less-restricted market with the potential to take business away from the embroiderers. The 1784 restructure reflects the changing nature of the market for embroidery during this period. By combining guilds, the government opened up the embroiderers' market share to other trades, and thus both increased and diversified the

⁴⁷ AN Y 9394b: 'Avis du procureur du roi sur des contestations entre ouvriers et maîtres des métiers de Paris. Bons de maîtrises et de jurandes', 1681-1790.

⁴⁸ Without the evidence to confirm specific expenditure, this is speculation.

⁴⁹ *Lettres patentes du Roi portant suppression de la communauté des maîtres passementiers-brodeurs et leur réunion au corps des marchands fabricans tissu tiers-rubanniers de Paris. Données à Versailles le 5 août 1784. Registrées en Parlement le vingt août 1784* (Paris: 1784).

⁵⁰ 'les privilèges, & de pouvoir se livrer à de nouvelles branches d'industrie'. Ibid., pp. 110-11.

level of competition with which they would need to negotiate. It further confirms that the guild of embroiderers had limited political and economic power to negotiate with the royal government and was subject to measures beyond its immediate control.

However, the restructures made the market for embroidery more competitive, and as a result, gave consumers a greater variety of choice. Evidence shows that the individuals who were accepted into the guild between the years 1776-91 were not necessarily trained embroiderers, but were now able to sell embroidery through their association with the guild and the corporate rights that this afforded.⁵¹ Moreover, each restructure created a legal loophole through which women were able to officially join the guild of embroiderers in Paris. In this period, 47 women were admitted to the reformed guild.⁵² It is conceivable that they sold the type of fashionable embroidery that was examined in Chapter 3, such as the embroidered waistcoats that were supplied by the Lyon embroiderers. Indeed, Chapter 3 demonstrated how new modes of consuming over the course of the eighteenth century led to a diversification in the ways in which embroidery was bought and sold, and that female shopkeepers such as Madame Aubeineau sold a variety of fashionable embroidered products.⁵³ It showed how in the 1770s and 1780s, 'fashionable' embroidery became available for instant purchase in the shops of the *marchands merciers* and that it was no longer essential for customers to engage in a lengthy commission process directly with an embroiderer. The guild as it had been before its 1776 restructure served mainly to regulate the trade which produced the gold and silver embroidery required of court etiquette. This is indicated by their statutes which regulated the type of embroidery produced by its members. The statutes regulated embroidery worn mainly at formal court appearances, such as the Order of the Holy Spirit which was the subject of Statute 34. By the later years of the eighteenth century, and as consumers demanded a greater variety of embroidered products, the guild as it had been before 1776 was no longer an effective framework for supplying the dual nature of consumer demand for embroidery. The aforementioned restructures were thus necessary to supply such consumer demand effectively and in particular, broaden the retailing parameters of the guild.

⁵¹ AN Y 9395a-b: 'Avis du procureur du roi sur des contestations entre ouvriers et maîtres des métiers de Paris. Bons de maîtrises et de jurandes', 1681-1790.

⁵² AN Y 9394-9396: 'Avis du procureur du roi sur des contestations entre ouvriers et maîtres des métiers de Paris. Bons de maîtrises et de jurandes', 1681-1790.

⁵³ ADP D43Z/1.

The complete abolition of the guilds in 1791 provided further opportunities for women in the Paris trade. Towards the end of the century, women began to open shops and enter into partnerships selling embroidery in its different forms. In 1791 for example, a business partnership was set up between two women, Marie Geneviève Perrier Bourgeot and Marie Anne Charlotte Duval, for the sale of ‘embroidery, lace and linen.’⁵⁴ The business was called *La Dlle Duval et Compagnie*, and was based on a covenant establishing that Duval would run the day-to-day operations of the shop and would not make any financial contribution to the establishment of the business, but would contribute her ‘industry, labour and care’.⁵⁵ Bourgeot, for her part, contributed 3,000 *livres*. The business partnership was contracted to run for six years, during which time the document suggests the women may have had multiple shops: ‘every year an inventory will be taken of all the merchandise which exists in the *shops*’.⁵⁶ The timing of Duval and Bourgeot’s business, the amount of money invested by Bourgeot, and the suggestion of more than one retail premises, is indicative of the effect of the new freedom afforded to individuals, and women in particular, by the collapse of the guild system. Furthermore, it indicates that greater freedom was needed in the sphere of retailing to effectively supply consumer demand for fashionable embroidery.

4.3 The Embroidery Trade in Eighteenth-Century Lyon

4.3.1 Structure

Without a guild to dictate the internal management of their occupation and regulate training, skills and production, the embroiderers of eighteenth-century Lyon were free to operate independently and unconfined by corporate regulations and inspections. How, then, did the absence of a guild affect the embroiderers and their trade in Lyon? Historians have argued that the guild system in France promoted social cohesion by replicating *ancien régime* society. Through their internal hierarchies of apprentices, journeymen, masters and the ruling board of *jurés*, it has been argued that the guilds in

⁵⁴ ‘le commerce de broderie, dentelles et linge’. AN MC/ET/LXV/506: ‘Société, Marie Geneviève Perrier Bourgeot et Marie Anne Charlotte Duval’, 12 November 1791, p. 1.

⁵⁵ ‘son industrie et ses peines et soins’, *ibid*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ ‘Il sera fait tous les ans un inventaire tant des marchandises existantes dans les magasins’, *ibid*, pp. 3-4.

France contributed to a reinforcement of the social order, and in recent years there has been a focus on the social functions of the guilds.⁵⁷ Despite the absence of a guild to dictate an official hierarchy of *jurés*, masters, apprentices and journeymen, it seems that the embroiderers in Lyon organised themselves into an unofficial and simplified hierarchy.

Archival evidence such as inventories, marriage contracts and other legal documentation suggests that similar to the trade in Paris, varieties in occupational titles denoted to some extent their experience, skill and status. The primary titles that were in use in Lyon during the eighteenth century were embroiderer/embroideress (*brodeur/brodeuse*), merchant embroiderer/embroideress (*marchand brodeur/brodeuse*) and merchant embroiderer and designer (*marchand brodeur dessinateur*). Broadly speaking, merchant embroiderers usually ran workshops or businesses which distributed work to the embroiderers; the embroiderers in turn worked either for a merchant embroiderer or independently. These titles indicate that unlike the guild-regulated trade in Paris, women in Lyon had a greater freedom to independently practise embroidery professionally and run commercial enterprises. This is further evidenced by the large number of legal disputes that female embroiderers in Lyon instigated in order to recover compensation for embroidery work carried out, suggesting that they had significant legal power compared to their Parisian counterparts.⁵⁸ Interestingly, the titles of master embroiderer and mistress embroideress were in use during the first half of the eighteenth century up until at least the early 1760s, despite there being no guild in which one could conceivably

⁵⁷ See for example: William H. Sewell Jr., *Work and Revolution: The Language of Labour from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Kaplan, 'Social Classification and Representation in the Corporate World of Eighteenth-Century France: Turgot's Carnival', in *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice*, ed. by Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koepp (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 176-228.

⁵⁸ The 'Registres des Contraventions' at the Archives municipales de Lyon hold records of disputes between those working within the *arts et métiers* community; between the years of 1750 and 1780, there were 254 legal disputes recorded between embroiderers and other embroiderers, as well as merchants and other trades. The number of lawsuits instigated by female embroiderers against merchant embroiderers, merchant silk manufacturers, and other female embroiderers far outweigh those brought by male embroiderers or merchants. Around 90 of these cases were legal disputes between two female embroiderers. See AML HH/243-267: 'Registres des Contraventions'.

attain a mastership. After this time, it seems that the use of the master or mistress prefix fell out of use. There is the possibility that male embroiderers who used this title came from Paris where they were a master in the Paris guild of embroiderers, but it is likely that such titles were self-appointed and chosen to give an air of respectability and status in the trade. We see the title mistress embroideress for example, mostly in apprentice contracts and disputes. Here, the prefix mistress conveys a sense of authority, essential for a legal contract and the master-apprentice relationship. In the absence of a guild to stipulate a formal framework for embroidery apprenticeship in Lyon, the use of these terms could conceivably be modelled on the Paris guild set-up in order to legitimise a non-guild training system.

4.3.2 Training and Apprenticeship

Historians have suggested that one of the main purposes of guilds was the training of the next generation of artisans and workers, and S. R. Epstein argues that guild-regulated training contributed to technological innovation.⁵⁹ However, the case of the embroidery trade in Lyon demonstrates that a guild was not necessary to enforce formal training. Whereas the Paris guild of embroiderers rigorously enforced an apprentice system of six years' training, the Lyonnais embroiderers had no such official guidance. Indeed, anyone was free to practise embroidery. This does not mean, however, that embroidery training in Lyon did not exist or was a skill simply passed down informally in the family. Training by apprenticeship was, in fact, widespread. Although there were no official regulations governing length of training or requirements, apprenticeship contracts were drawn up between embroiderer, apprentice and in most cases, the apprentice's guardian. Contracts were expectedly shorter than the Paris guild apprenticeship, and varied between one and four years in length, and two years seems to have been the norm.⁶⁰ However, breaches and terminations of embroidery apprenticeships were also prevalent in eighteenth-

⁵⁹ Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Pre-Industrial Europe'.

⁶⁰ This range is captured in AM HH/25: 'Règlements particuliers pour chaque communauté et affaires particulières – brodeurs et brodeuses', c. 1759-74. An apprenticeship contract found in the Archives départementales du Rhône between Thérèse Prevost and Philippe Remy Nocart (designer) is for two years. See for example ADR 3 E 9451b: 'Apprentissage Prevost/Nocart', 14 December 1769.

century Lyon, particularly from the 1760s onwards.⁶¹ It was not uncommon for apprentice embroiderers to last just three or four months in a contract, whether this was on the part of the embroiderer or the apprentice embroiderer.⁶²

This freedom of movement and lenient training framework made embroidery in Lyon an extremely flexible occupation, and one which was able to quickly adapt to variations in consumer demand. Unlike the trade in Paris, whose strict apprenticeship and mastership regulations made it difficult for embroiderers to respond to fluctuations in fashion, the Lyonnais embroiderers were in an enviable position. In this way, it can be argued that it was in not forming a guild and not enforcing strict training regulations that the Lyonnais embroiderers could be seen to be innovative. Freedom of labour movement and training gave the embroiderers a competitive advantage, with the flexibility to meet the fluctuations in consumer demand throughout the eighteenth century.

4.3.3 Lyon Embroiderers and the *Grand Fabrique*

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the embroiderers in Lyon were largely ignored by related and competitor trades. Few lawsuits were brought against embroiderers by guilds of other trades during this period which enabled the embroiderers to go about their trade with little interference from those such as the silk masters and merchants, the lace-makers and button-makers.⁶³ With the absence of corporate statutes, the embroiderers were also not in a position to adequately defend production rights, a possible explanation for the lack of attempted legal action against competitor trades on the part of embroiderers. During this early period the fashion for heavy patterned and brocaded silks meant that the embroiderers posed little threat to the silk industry in Lyon. However,

⁶¹ Instances of apprenticeship contract breaches included complaints about apprentices not having been properly remunerated or taught. For example, on 14 December 1776 Jean François Thomas (a hatter) took legal action against Joseph Mourin (a silk manufacturer) and his wife, an embroideress, for failing to properly teach embroidery to 'Thomas' daughter. See HH/25: 14 December 1776.

⁶² AM HH/25. In the case of Demoiselle Babis, she lasted just 71 working days of an apprenticeship with Demoiselle Bicon, an embroideress, from 20 September until 17 December 1770. See AM HH/25: 'Babis and Bicon', [n.d].

⁶³ A survey of the 'Registres des contraventions' at the Archives municipales de Lyon indicates that few legal cases involved embroiderers in the first half of the century.

changes in fashionable textiles in the latter years of the eighteenth century meant that heavy brocaded silks gradually fell out of favour and there was a considerable rise in the popularity of painted and embroidered silks from the 1770s onwards.⁶⁴

The relative freedom that the embroiderers enjoyed by not being subject to the jurisdiction of a guild meant that they were well-placed to keep up with the fluctuations in fashion that the textile industry saw during the latter half of the eighteenth century, as we have seen with their approach to training. Indeed, it was quicker to add embroidery by hand with a needle to decorate a fabric rather than the lengthy processes involved in setting up a loom to weave a patterned silk. In this way, the embroiderers were well-placed to produce embellished designs which were in keeping with the latest fashions and tastes. With the absence of a guild and no official regulations to adhere to, the Lyonnais embroiderers were able to capitalise on increased consumer demand for their products without the restrictive production-related statutes to which other guild-regulated trades were subject. Although many guilds changed their regulations in light of changing fashions, jurisdictional changes lagged behind and often resulted in illegal production and fraud.⁶⁵

In the later years of the eighteenth century, and in parallel with the increased popularity of embroidered products such as waistcoats, competitor trades turned their attention to the embroiderers. During the 1770s in particular, legal action was brought against embroiderers and those distributing embroidery work (such as *marchands fabricants*) by the *Grande Fabrique* (the silk-weaving guild), the lace-makers and the button-makers.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Lesley E. Miller, 'A Study of Designers in the Lyon Silk Industry 1712-1787' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Brighton, 1988), pp. 85-6.

⁶⁵ Clandestine and fraudulent production which took place outside of guild jurisdiction in the embroidery trade is explored in Chapter 5.

⁶⁶ See for example: AM HH/262: '*boutonniers* v. Simon, *maitre boutonniere* and veuve Delisle, *brodeuse* and veuve Bonnet, *brodeuse*', 13 March 1771; AM HH/265: '*passementiers* v. Arthaud, *marchand fabricant* and Evreux, *brodeuse*', 28 August 1777. It should be noted that legal action was in most cases taken against *marchands fabricants* who themselves employed embroiderers or had embroidered items in their possession. This is in part indicated by the large fines imposed which only the wealthiest merchants could afford, and by the evidence in the 'Registres des contraventions'; in the majority of cases, the primary accusers and accused are merchants, with individual embroiderers merely being alluded to or called as a witness. The 'Registres des contraventions' also document a large number of cases of lawsuits in the same period between

The *Grande Fabrique* in particular was concerned with the effect that the new fashion for embroidery had on their industry. They deplored the fact that a preference for ‘an ephemeral business, work which can be carried out just as well elsewhere as in this town’ had led to, in their opinion, a decline in the production of brocaded silks.⁶⁷ In reality, however, it was the demand for plain silks to which embroidery could be added which replaced demand for heavy brocaded silks.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, unlike the lace-makers and button-makers, the silk-weaving guild was proactive in issuing an institutional response to the increased demand for a new type of product. They recognised that the freedom and flexibility of embroidery, which in theory could be practised by anyone due to the absence of a guild, threatened certain branches of their own industry.

An *Ordonnance du Consulat de la Ville de Lyon* issued in 1778 noted in particular that ‘this taste [for embroidery] has become so widespread, that the Manufacturers have been forced to give in to this new mode of work, so much so that Embroidery today has become the most important branch in the Business of Silk.’⁶⁹ As well as silk production, silk merchants now found that it was essential to engage with the business of embroidery in order to keep up with consumer demand. Silk merchants were heavily involved in the embroidery trade by the late eighteenth century, commissioning embroidery directly and distributing the work to embroiderers, with some even running large embroidery workshops. Lyon silk merchants were instrumental in supplying the luxury markets of Paris with the embroidered waistcoats which had gained popularity around this time. But not only had embroidery become ‘the most important branch in the Business of Silk’ in Lyon, it was also entirely unregulated.⁷⁰ With no precedent set by an embroidery guild in Lyon, or specific embroidery-related regulations in the statutes of the *Grande Fabrique*,

embroiderers, and embroiderers and *marchands fabricants*, usually with money being owed for embroidery work carried out.

⁶⁷ ‘un commerce éphémère, une main-d’œuvre qui pouvoit s’exécuter chez l’Etranger tout aussi bien que dans cette Ville’. AM HH135/Chappe VII-h.190 b No. 147: ‘Ordonnance consulaire’, 3 February 1778.

⁶⁸ Miller, ‘A Study of Designers in the Lyon Silk Industry 1712-1787’, pp. 85-6.

⁶⁹ ‘ce goût étoit devenu si général, que les Fabricants avoient été nécessités à se livrer à ce nouveau genre de travail, de manière que le Broderie faisoit aujourd’hui la branche la plus essentielle du Commerce de la Fabrique.’ AM HH135/Chappe VII-h.190 b No. 147.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

embroiderers and merchants were able to profit from increasing consumer demand for a product which had very little regulation.

One of the implications of a lack of regulation was that the copying of embroidery designs was widespread. Similar to the Paris guild of embroiderers, the *Grande Fabrique* issued various amendments to its statutes throughout the eighteenth century in response to the changing commercial environment. Before 1778, the most recent statutes of the *Grand Fabrique* dated to 1744 and 1776, with the former protecting designs for the first time.⁷¹ However, the 1744 regulations of the *Grande Fabrique* pertaining to silk design (*Règlements*, 1744, Articles 12 & 13 of Section 9) did not extend to embroidery and this loophole was certainly exploited by those capitalising on the new business of embroidery. In 1778, a lawsuit was brought against silk merchants Gilibert & Cie and Desjardin & Cie by Claude Gillermin, merchant embroiderer and designer.⁷² Gillermin used Article 13 of Section 9 of the *Grande Fabrique's* statutes of 1744 to bring legal action against Gilibert and Desjardin for having copied and distributed embroidery designs created by Gillermin for Desjardin. Four waistcoats had been seized from la Demoiselle Delorme, who had embroidered the waistcoats from designs given to her by Gilibert. Gillermin claimed that such distribution was in contravention of the above named statutes. The *jurés* of the *Grande Fabrique* agreed with Gillermin's claims and both Gilibert and Desjardin were fined 21 *livres*.

The statutes were updated a week later. The *Ordonnance Consulaire* issued on 3 February 1778 confirmed that those involved in the business of embroidery found to be distributing or copying embroidery would be fined 100 *livres*. For designers, the fine was 1,000 *livres*.⁷³ Several lawsuits followed in the wake of these changes to the official regulations. On 10 February that same year, legal action was brought against Fraisse, a silk merchant, by Arthaud, also a silk merchant in Lyon, in which it was claimed that Fraisse had copied an embroidery design which belonged to Arthaud. The *jurés* had seized 'a length of *gros de Tours* in English green measuring eight and a half *aunes*, embroidered in different coloured silks, the design of which is absolutely similar to a design belonging to

⁷¹ Miller, 'Innovation and Industrial Espionage in Eighteenth-Century France: An Investigation of the Selling of Silks through Samples', *Journal of Design History*, 12/3 (1999), 271-92 (p. 279).

⁷² AM HH/265, 27 January 1778.

⁷³ AM HH135/Chappe VII-h.190 b No. 147.

Mr. Arthaud, on which it has been based'.⁷⁴ Fraisse argued that on the contrary, the design had been sold to him legitimately by a designer named Nocart. In January 1779, Dumas, a merchant embroideress in Lyon was accused of having copied an embroidery design for a suit panel from the silk merchants May & Cie and was prosecuted under the newly-reformed Article 13 of Section 9.⁷⁵ The widows Guillot and Escoffier, both embroideresses in Lyon, were similarly prosecuted in February and March of the same year for having embroidered waistcoats with copied designs.⁷⁶ With the new regulations and the onslaught of prosecutions, embroidery design was brought into line with silk design and thus marked an attempt by the *Grande Fabrique* to regulate the embroidery trade in Lyon.

The changes to the corporate regulations of the *Grande Fabrique* were a direct result of the fashion for delicately embroidered textiles in the late eighteenth century and the competition that the embroiderers posed to the silk industry. The *Grande Fabrique* thus sought to bring the embroidery trade under control to its advantage by bringing the embroiderers and others involved in the trade into line with its own agenda. Around the same time in Paris, the restructuring of the guild system in 1784 led to the Paris guild of embroiderers being joined with the *Marchands Fabricans d'étoffes*, the Paris equivalent of the *Grande Fabrique*. The objective here was to simplify the guild system and facilitate the royal government's control of commerce and industry. At the same time, it was argued that the incorporation of the embroiderers would afford them the same rights and privileges of a large and influential guild. Unlike in Paris, however, where the embroiderers were fully incorporated into the guild of *Marchands Fabricans d'étoffes*, the position of the Lyonnais embroiderers was more ambiguous. The *Grande Fabrique* took it upon itself to incorporate, to a limited extent, the embroiderers into its guild. It argued that regulating aspects of embroidery, such as design, would ensure the continuation of consumer confidence in Lyonnais products. Furthermore, the *Grande Fabrique* also lent its support to embroiderers who sought to file lawsuits against other individuals. In this way, the embroiderers of Lyon were not completely outside of guild jurisdiction by the late eighteenth century, and

⁷⁴ 'une étoffe gros de tours fond vert anglois tirant huit aunes et demie Brodées en soye de differentes nuances dont le dessein est absolument semblable à un dessein appartenant aud. Sr. Arthaud sur lequel il a été copié'. AM HH/265, 10 February; AM HH/265, 17 February; AM HH/265, 24 February.

⁷⁵ AM HH/266, 19 January 1779; AM HH/266, 27 January 1779.

⁷⁶ AM HH/266, 23 February 1779; HH/266, 23 March 1779.

were able to call upon a guild with considerable influence in time of need. But their incorporation into the *Grande Fabrique* only went so far: the guild's main concern was to bring the embroiderers in line with their specific regulations and thus protect their own production rights and market share.

Why, then, did the embroiderers of Lyon not form their own guild? By joining together in a corporation, the embroiderers would have been able to defend production rights, regulate production standards, as well as training and an internal hierarchy. By the 1770s in particular, the embroiderers may well have benefited from their own guild to govern their common interests and defend themselves from legal action by other guilds. Indeed, the presence of an embroidery guild in Lyon may have discouraged attempts of the *Grande Fabrique* to regulate the embroidery trade in their own interests. Yet it is evident that a guild was unnecessary to ensure the economic success of the embroidery trade in Lyon. As a trade which did not require large capital investment or sophisticated technology, a guild would not have provided much more than legal support and guidance, something which the embroiderers were able to seek from the *Grande Fabrique* in return for the updated statutes of 1778. Furthermore, the embroiderers replicated elements of the Paris guild that they saw advantageous, such as an informal occupational hierarchy to regulate the organisation of work and apprenticeships, without being subject to the strict production regulations which hindered the Paris embroiderers' ability to meet consumer demand. Instead, when the popularity of fashionable embroidered textiles, particularly men's waistcoats, significantly increased in the 1770s, the embroiderers of Lyon were poised to meet this consumer demand. In particular, it was their non-guild status and the flexibility which this afforded that ensured the commercial success of their trade in Lyon.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the institutional context of the guild and non-guild regulated embroidery trade in eighteenth-century Paris and Lyon. Through an examination of the trade in Paris, I have argued that the guild-regulated embroidery trade was an outmoded framework which mainly catered to the production of traditional embroidery, such as that for formal court clothing. Nevertheless, the guild attempted to adapt to changes in embroidery consumption during this period through jurisdictional methods such as changing its legal statutes. It is evident from the archival material that the trade in Paris attempted to keep up with the fluctuations in consumer demand for embroidery as best

as it could within the confines of guild regulation. However, the limited financial and political power that the embroiderers had in comparison to the larger trades meant that its jurisdictional framework was slow to adapt to the changing market. Furthermore, the restructures of the guild in the late eighteenth century demonstrate that there was a serious need to redefine the parameters of the guild, particularly in the context of retailing, in order to serve the increasing consumer demand for the ‘new’ fashionable embroidery sold in the shops of the *marchands merciers*.

The non-guild regulated trade in Lyon was demonstrative of the advantages that not being part of a guild during the late eighteenth century afforded. Whilst it borrowed elements of the Paris guild, such as apprentice contracts and an informal occupational hierarchy, it remained free from the restraints of guild-regulated production. In doing so, the trade in Lyon was able to adapt and respond quickly to fluctuations in consumer demand. The novelty that customers demanded, such as delicately-embroidered embellishments in lieu of the heavy brocaded silks that the *Grande Fabrique* produced, was easily fabricated by an unregulated trade where an individual required neither a lengthy apprenticeship, nor large capital investment and sophisticated machinery. Such was the case that the *Grande Fabrique* saw the Lyon embroiderers as a direct threat to their industry and subsequently sought to regulate their trade. The following chapter will examine the business of embroidery in its everyday context and analyse how the embroiderers navigated the jurisdictional parameters of the guild in carrying out their daily activities.

CHAPTER 5

Threading the Needle: Production and Artisans

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the different institutional contexts in which embroidery was produced in Paris and Lyon. It demonstrated the contrasting jurisdictional frameworks within which the guild and non-guild regulated trade operated in Paris and Lyon. In contrast, this chapter investigates the realities of business practice in embroidery, examining how the professional embroiderers of eighteenth-century France navigated guild regulations in carrying out their daily activities. It will propose that the nature of consumer demand for embroidery led to a situation in which professional embroiderers in Paris were not always able – or willing – to organise their business and production practices within the strict parameters of the guild, opting instead to engage in extra-guild activity.

This chapter firstly argues that credit relations between embroiderers and their aristocratic customers had a profound effect on the organisation of production within the guild-regulated context of Paris. It will show how the lengthy terms of credit granted to aristocratic customers for embroidery purchased out of ‘duty of rank’ for court appearances led to a conflict between the makers’ need to adhere to guild regulations and their need to respond to consumer demand. Secondly, this chapter will analyse how networks of subcontracting extended across guild jurisdiction and how clandestine production was embedded in the embroidery trade. It will show that the independence of non-guild female workers subverted the theoretical discourse of the guild and was essential to the success of the embroidery trade in meeting consumer demand. In doing so, this chapter argues that clandestine production did not necessarily entail defective or sub-quality work as the Paris guild of embroiderers claimed, but on the contrary, that the embroidery produced in the non-guild regulated areas of Paris entailed a high degree of skill and served to supply the gold and silver embroidery required by the sartorial etiquette of the court. Finally, this chapter will show how embroidery and silk merchants in Lyon met the demand for fashionable embroidery in the late eighteenth century, able to do so by the absence of guild-regulated production. They devised their own methods of operating. As a result, a type of fashionable Lyonnais silk embroidery emerged in the

second half of the century, produced on a larger scale by a predominantly female workforce.

The surviving evidence for professional embroiderers and embroidery merchants in Paris and Lyon across the eighteenth century is not complete, and so this chapter uses a range of archival evidence to examine their business practices. The fraudulent nature of clandestine production and the employment of *faux ouvriers* (unskilled workers) makes it difficult to reconstruct these practices using account books and correspondence, for example. These practices are rendered visible only by the guild, who took legal action against master and court embroiderers. These legal cases are not stored in one archive series but rather have been found sporadically across a number of locations and cover mainly the first half of the century, with 31 of these surviving in manuscript form in the Archives nationales for the years 1686-1739.¹ From 1740 onwards, no further legal cases relating to embroiderers have been found in this series and so this analysis has been supplemented with printed legal cases and guild petitions at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, of which only four survive between 1752-65. Before the second half of the century, few substantial records survive in Lyon for embroiderers or embroidery merchants, making it difficult to assess with any certainty the type of embroidery produced in Lyon before the 1770s. It is possible that the lack of documentation relating to embroidery for the first half of the century is an indication that embroidery was not needed in Lyon in the same way that it was in Paris, due to the prominence of the court. Further, that embroidery in Lyon did not become fully commercialised until it became more fashionable than the brocaded silks produced by Lyon silk manufacturers. The large number of surviving embroidered waistcoats thought to be of Lyonnais provenance for the late eighteenth century, along with the proliferation of references to embroidery from Lyon in the fashion press, trade cards and merchant correspondence during the 1770s and 1780s, are my basis for arguing that Lyon was a major centre of production of the new fashionable silk embroidery. This is corroborated with evidence from the bankruptcy records of Lyonnais embroidery and silk merchants.

¹ See AN Y 9372-9396b: 'Avis du procureur du roi sur des contestations entre ouvriers et maîtres des métiers de Paris. Bons de maîtrises et de jurandes', 1681-1790. 52 legal cases against master and court embroiderers are contained in this series for the years 1686-1739, of which 31 relate to the employment of unskilled workers.

5.1 Consumer Credit Networks

Professional embroiderers were deeply entwined in credit relations with their aristocratic customers during this period. The concept of credit was based on ideas of mutual trust, understanding and most importantly, reputation.² Credit in the eighteenth century was granted according to the ‘quality’ of the person. Due to their economic and social standing, customers of high calibre were able to purchase expensive luxury products on a long credit cycle, their acquisitions not paid in full until months or even years after the receipt of the product. Embroiderers who supplied the nobility were therefore caught up in this credit cycle, and were often owed vast sums by their clients. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, embroiderers in Paris regularly supplied customers who required clothing which adhered to the visual etiquette of the court. Such embroidery was expensive, consisting of elaborate, bespoke designs in gold and silver.

Receipts evidence the lengthy terms of credit which were granted to such customers by embroiderers, and the large amounts of money which embroiderers were owed. These documents show that long consumer credit cycles were a sustaining feature of the embroiderers’ business throughout the eighteenth century. An extreme case was that of Dutrou, embroiderer in ordinary to the king (*brodeur ordinaire du Roi*) who issued a receipt in 1708 for the payment of embroidery which he had completed for the marquis de Tilladet 22 years earlier. In total, the marquis owed Dutrou 2,162 *livres* for various works of gold and silver embroidery.³ In 1719, the late Duchesse de Vendôme’s heir paid Joseph Franyou, also embroiderer in ordinary to the king, the outstanding bill of 1,950 *livres* 17 *sols* 6 *deniers* for embroidery work carried out in 1711 and 1718 respectively.⁴ On 5 December 1741, the Prince de Condé paid Jacques Dollé, a master embroiderer, the remaining 5,990 *livres* of a total of 7,990 *livres* owed for embroidery work completed for

² In the eighteenth century, credit documents such as bills of exchange were accepted based on the reputation of the named individual. See James Riley and John McCusker, ‘Money Supply, Economic Growth, and the Quantity Theory of Money: France 1650-1788’, *Explorations in Economic History*, 20 (1983), 274-93.

³ AN MC/ET/IV/343: ‘Dutrou, quittance pour travaux de broderies fournis 1686-90 au marquis de Tilladet (Jean Baptiste de Cassagnet)’, 4 July 1708.

⁴ AN MC/ET/XCII/405: ‘Joseph Franyou, quittance pour des ouvrages de broderie pour la duchesse de Vendôme’, 16 November 1719.

the Prince over a period of three years from 1737 to 1740.⁵ In the 1749 bankruptcy file of the master embroiderer Duhamel, we can see that his customers derived in the main from the upper echelons of society, including eight dukes, five marquises, three counts, four knights, a prince, the president of the Rennes *parlement*, and the Duke of Castropignano, the Neapolitan ambassador to Paris. Combined, they owed Duhamel a total of 17,889 *livres* 4 *sols* 4 *deniers*. Finally, in 1771, the marquis de Bouzols signed an agreement to pay Antoine Marteau, master embroiderer, the outstanding amount of 2,257 *livres* 9 *sols* for embroidery work carried out by 1 April 1774: a three-year gap between delivery and payment.⁶

Social necessity drove such customers to purchase the lavish embroidery produced by the professional embroiderers of eighteenth-century Paris. Indeed, it was better to be in debt to their embroiderers and other suppliers than to risk being socially ostracised for not wearing the correct attire according to their rank.⁷ Furthermore, although the cut of garments did not change significantly, small changes in the fashionable design of textiles and embellishment occurred frequently to satisfy consumer desire for novelty.⁸ Difficulties therefore arose for embroiderers as long cycles of credit for wealthy clients conflicted with their need to purchase regularly the expensive primary materials required to execute the richly decorated pieces for frequent appearances at court and public festivals or celebrations.⁹ The following section will explore how embroiderers in Paris navigated these cycles of consumer credit through the practice of subcontracting.

⁵ AN MC/ET/XCII/514: 'Jacques Dollé, quittance pour taux de broderie (Prince de Condé)', 5 December 1741.

⁶ AN MC/ET/XCI/1089: 'Antoine Marteau, obligation pour ouvrages de broderie', 2 April 1771.

⁷ See the first three chapters of this thesis for discussions of the sartorial etiquette of the court and the embroidery that was required for this type of clothing.

⁸ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 10. See also Chapter 1 of this thesis for an explanation of the types of clothing which would be embroidered and how this changed over the course of the eighteenth century.

⁹ Public events such as religious festivals, marriages and baptisms demanded the purchase of new clothes and the fashion trades followed this calendar of consumption which revolved around social events and court ceremonies. See Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, pp. 76-7.

5.2 Subcontracting Networks

Subcontracting was a common practice in the luxury trades and was an important production strategy in the smaller trades. It was particularly the case when new modes of consuming increased the frequency with which consumer goods were being produced, yet did not need a substantial investment in fixed capital.¹⁰ Historians have demonstrated that most luxury and fashion-related trades employed the services of, or subcontracted work to, smaller trades. Indeed it was necessary to do so in order to meet consumer demand and access the specialised skills of individual artisans.¹¹ Subcontracting took place in the embroidery trade of both Paris and Lyon, but it will become apparent that it was in the guild-regulated trade in Paris where problems arose as a result of the complex networks that this practice entailed.

Artisans in the luxury trades subcontracted work to the embroiderers. That is, if the customer had not commissioned their services directly. Embroidery was an embellishment which enhanced the final product, such as a suit or gown, and so the embroiderers were situated within a broader chain of subcontracting. In general, embroidery was not the final stage in the making of a garment, as the fabric would be stretched out onto a frame to be embroidered before it was assembled into its final shape as a suit or waistcoat, for example. Nor was it the first stage, since the material would generally be supplied already cut to length or shape, depending on the garment. Tailors, seamstresses and fashion merchants as well as the non-garment trades such as *marchands merciers*, coach-makers, upholsterers and furniture-makers, all employed the services of professional embroiderers to embellish their final products. For example, the master embroiderer Duhamel also supplied not only his aristocratic clients but also other artisans. The latter included four master tailors (*maîtres tailleurs*) and a master belt-maker (*maître ceinturier*), who presumably had commissioned the services of Duhamel on behalf of their own wealthy customers. The majority of the master embroiderer Trouillebert's clients

¹⁰ Giorgio Riello, 'Strategies and Boundaries: Subcontracting and the London Trades in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Enterprise & Society*, 9/2 (2008), 243-80 (p. 248).

¹¹ See in particular Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics, and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also James R. Farr, 'On the Shop Floor: Guilds, Artisans, and the European Market Economy, 1350-1750', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1 (1997), 24-54 (pp. 35-6).

were also artisans, such as second-hand clothes dealers and tailors.¹² It is here that we can see the intermediate point which embroiderers occupied within the chain of subcontracting in the luxury trades.

In the guild-regulated trade, the whole product (the embroidery) was subcontracted by a tailor or other artisan to a master embroiderer who in turn distributed the different tasks involved in the production process among his workers. The workers would have been an apprentice, the master's wife, and other family members (for example, children and parents). In theory, this allocation of labour took place in the master embroiderer's home in a domestic workshop-type setting where he was able to oversee the whole process and retain control over who performed each task (figures 5.1 and 5.2). This was indeed the case when conditions were favourable. In the autumn of 1719 for example, the Paris master embroiderer Jean Megret recorded in his daybook that he had embroidered a man's suit and pair of stockings in silver for the cost of 231 *livres* 39 *deniers*. Aside from the materials, he recorded 45 *livres* for the work of his parents and 21 *livres* 5 *sols* 9 *deniers* for the work of his wife.¹³ The image conveyed here is that of a domestic workshop in which the embroidery for a man's court suit was produced through the interdependent activities of one family under the same roof, and under the direction of the male master embroiderer. Indeed, the guild dictated this organisation of production through its regulations, which were both hierarchical and patriarchal. Unsurprisingly, many guilds (with the exception of all-female guilds such as the linen drapers and seamstresses) excluded women from the mastership. The guild of embroiderers specified that women should not become masters, run workshops or take on apprentices. Furthermore, master embroiderers were not permitted to distribute work outside of their home to anyone other than another master embroiderer, or employ anyone other than the son or daughter of a master.

¹² ADP D4/B6/Cart.106/Dossier 7519: 'Louis Trouillebert, bilan faillite', 5 June 1789.

¹³ ADP D5/B6/Reg. 591 (greffe 123): 'Jean Megret, livre de comptes des avancées et fourniture des ouvrages qui concernent la broderie', 1720-25.

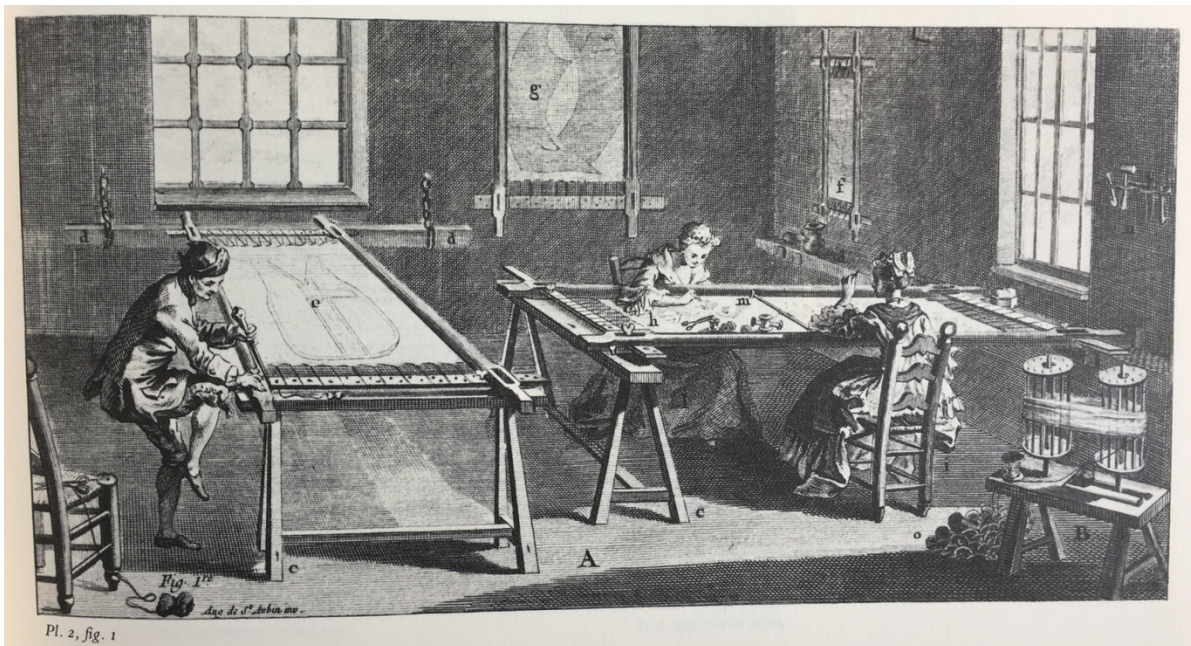
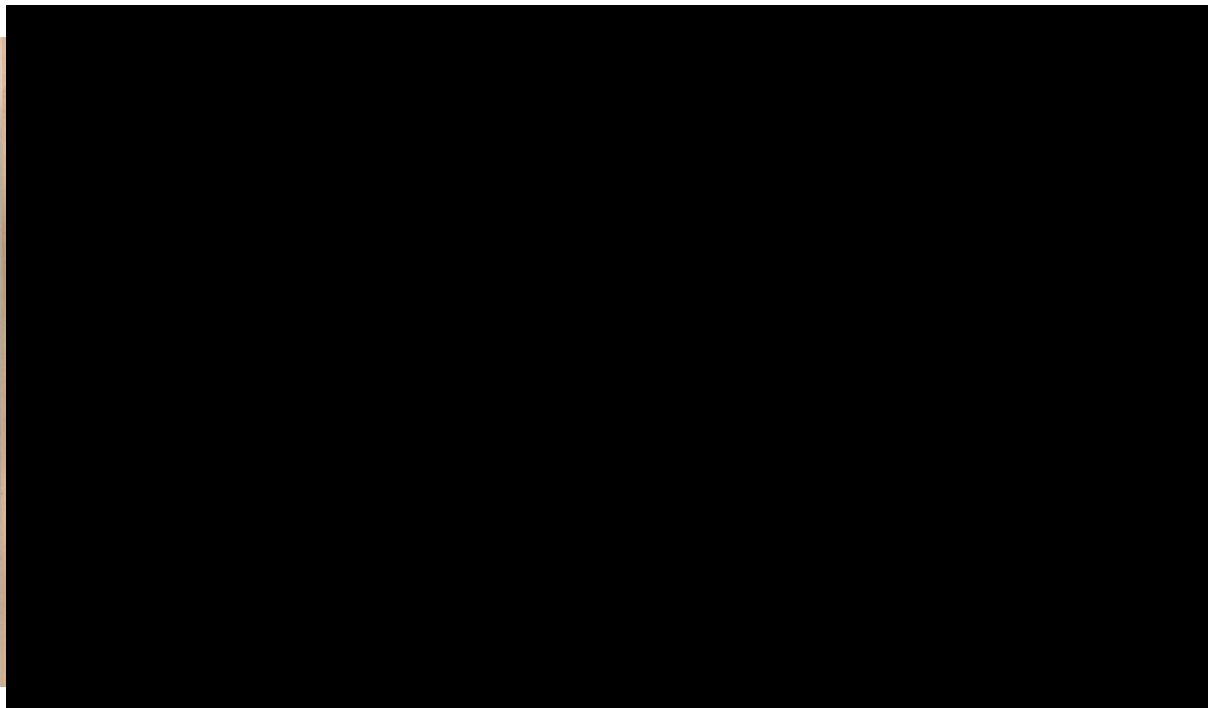


Figure 5.1. Plate 2, figure 1 from Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), p. 23.



Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers
Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques: avec leur explication,
 Plate 1, Book II, Part I (Paris: Briasson, 1762-72). AE25.E53 1751. © 2000–2018 The
 Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In 1770, the official regulations of the guild continued to be promoted by Saint-Aubin in his treatise on embroidery, *L'Art du brodeur*. He perpetuated the image of the master embroiderer and his family workshop and reinforced the patriarchal nature of the guild-regulated trade through his descriptions of the organisation of work and different embroidery techniques. Saint-Aubin's account conveys the idea that the division of labour within the embroidery trade was gendered, and that one piece of embroidery was executed by several different male and female workers. Saint-Aubin even suggested that embroidery was one of the best paid occupations for women in the eighteenth century:

This is one of the trades in which women can earn the highest daily wages. They are paid ordinarily twenty-five *sols* per day or four francs per ounce of *passé* (gold for [satin stitch]) used. This sum is increased in proportion with the amount of work to be done or when the materials are finer or more delicate. Men, however, are paid more – the sum depending on the degree of their talent or competency. The day's work is from six in the morning to eight in the evening; for longer hours, workers are paid double.¹⁴

In Saint-Aubin's account of how production was organised in the embroidery trade, there is a clear demarcation of gender and skill. In *L'Art du brodeur*, women's embroidery work is associated with volume of output or composition of materials, with no reference to their skill. In contrast, Saint-Aubin associates male embroiderers with 'talent' and 'competency'. Describing a type of embroidery in low-relief, Saint-Aubin says: 'A characteristic of the most talented Artisans creating this embroidery [...] is to even exaggerate a bit when giving full roundness and true definition to the objects' different

¹⁴ 'C'est un des métiers où les femmes gagnent les meilleures journées : on leur donne ordinairement vingt-cinq sols par jour, ou quatre francs pour l'emploi d'une once de passé ; cela augmente à proportion qu'il y a plus abondamment d'ouvrage ou que les matieres sont plus fines ou plus délicates. Les hommes sont payés davantage, à proportion de leur talent ou de leur habileté. La journée doit commencer à six heures du matin & finir à huit heures du soir ; la veillée par-delà, se paye double.' Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), p. 9. Hereafter *L'Art du brodeur*. Scheuer's translation, p. 25. 'satin stitch' is my own modification.

shapes.¹⁵ The artisan here is referred to with the masculine pronoun until: ‘The Embroideresses (*brodeuses*) next cover it all with their spindle of gold [thread], laying each thread in a direction perpendicular to the last layer.’¹⁶ And further, in his description of the technique of *guipure* embroidery, a type of embroidery where pieces of raised vellum shapes are covered with gold thread, the male embroiderer is charged with the cutting out and arranging of the shapes, tasks which have traditionally been perceived as highly skilled and associated with male workers in other trades, for example in the case of the tailors.¹⁷ The women workers in Saint-Aubin’s account merely cover the assembled structure with the thread.¹⁸ According to these written accounts, the work was divided according to a hierarchy of skill which itself was gendered. The interdependence of men and women in the embroidery trade as described by Saint-Aubin is uncontroversial but is clearly not based on equality. In theory, the higher-status tasks, such as design transfer and cutting out, were performed by men, with the more menial stitching being distributed to women. In the official printed discourse surrounding the embroidery trade then, women were seen as auxiliary workers and merely added to the men’s work. The reader is persuaded that the performance of different tasks in professional embroidery was gendered and that the completion of one piece of embroidery relied on a partnership, or team, of both men and women.

Whilst the production set-up described above was the ideal as promoted by the guild and commentators such as Saint-Aubin, the embroiderers themselves also subcontracted work to other embroiderers. It is this practice which challenges the theory set forth in the written sources. Subcontracting was necessary within the embroidery trade because it enabled master embroiderers to access a specialised skillset when required. The frequency of courtly consumer demand could be extremely unpredictable. Periods of mourning which brought the luxury and fashion trades almost to a standstill could be lengthy, and celebrations such as marriages, baptisms, and foreign ambassador visits,

¹⁵ ‘Quand chaque objet a toutes ses rondeurs & formes différentes bien sensibles & meme un peu outrées, (ce qui est l’ouvrage des plus intelligents Ouvriers [...])’. Ibid., pp. 11-12. Scheuer’s translation, p. 28.

¹⁶ ‘les Brodeuses couvrent le tout en sens contraire aux derniers fils, avec de l’or en broche cousu à petits points alternes, d’une fois bien cirée’. Ibid., p. 12. Scheuer’s translation, p. 28.

¹⁷ Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁸ Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 37.

could generate a sudden demand for embroidered court suits and dresses. Subcontracting enabled embroiderers to mitigate the risks associated with a lull in demand, whilst granting them access to highly skilled workers who would enable them to deliver the quality which elite consumers expected. The guild recognised that subcontracting within the trade would at times be necessary, and so its statutes accounted for this. Subcontracting was, however, conditional upon master embroiderers and privileged court embroiderers only subcontracting work to other master embroiderers.

For example, on 30 July 1708, Jean Magoulet, embroiderer to the late queen (*brodeur de la feue reine*), subcontracted work to three master embroiderers: François Martin, Louis Pimedde and Jean Aublé. All three lived and worked in the rue Saint-Denis and the rue Montorgueil. These streets were in close proximity to each other and in an area where many embroiderers operated.¹⁹ The general area surrounding the rue Saint-Denis was home to a large number of producers in the clothing, fashion and luxury trades, including gold braid-makers, ribbon-makers, lace-makers, and button-makers, amongst others.²⁰ Magoulet subcontracted out the embroidering of coverlets for the *Régiment de la Colonelle Generale de la Cavalerie de France*²¹ to the three men, stipulating that the work must conform to the original sample which Magoulet would provide; Magoulet would also provide the wool to be used. It was agreed that the work would be finished and delivered back to him by the last day in December that year. The three master embroiderers were therefore given a total of five months to complete the work. They were contracted to embroider 100 coverlets each, with the exception of Aublé, who was commissioned to produce 120. For each cover completed, Magoulet would pay 3 *livres* 15 *sols*. Upon completion of the work, the master embroiderers could expect to earn 375 *livres* each (with Aublé being able to earn 450 *livres*).²²

¹⁹ John Styles has argued that trades formed clusters in specific geographical areas within metropolitan cities and that these were linked through extensive networks of subcontracting. See John Styles, 'The Goldsmiths and the London Trades, 1550-1750', in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skills, 1550-1750*, ed. by David Mitchell (Stroud: Alan Sutton and Centre for Metropolitan History, 1995), pp. 112-20 (p. 114).

²⁰ Natacha Coquery, *L'Hôtel aristocratique: le marché du luxe à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), pp. 61-2.

²¹ Cavalry regiment created in 1635.

²² AN MC/ET/XXIV/541: 'Jean Magoulet, Marché', 30 July 1708.

It is highly likely that Magoulet subcontracted this work to these embroiderers because they specialised in this type of embroidery, and this enabled Magoulet to draw upon a pool of master embroiderers with a specialised skillset in wool embroidery. Indeed, Saint-Aubin tells us that it was a technique used especially for military and particularly large items, and that wool embroidery was more durable than silk and could produce brighter colours.²³ Archival evidence confirms that embroiderers chose to specialise in certain types of products. The master embroiderer vestment-makers (*maitres brodeurs chasubliers*), for example, produced solely church and religious ornament, whilst other master embroiderers chose to specialise in gold and silver embroidery for clothing, mainly serving a courtly clientele. Others specialised in the embroidering of furnishings and upholstery. The daybook of Megret is evidence that master embroiderers subcontracted work to specialist embroiderers in order to meet varied consumer demand, and that the domestic workshop, in which the whole family worked together to produce a finished product, was not always sustainable or realistic. For example, during 1726-27, Megret subcontracted the embroidering of upholstery and other furnishings to another embroiderer, Rivet Aublé. Until this date, the daybook shows that Megret had solely produced gold and silver embroidery for clothing, suggesting that he did not have the necessary skills, experience, or pairs of hands to produce embroidered upholstery, at least not to the standard which may have been required by the customer. Here, subcontracting was used by Megret to draw upon the skills of other specialist embroiderers without having to invest himself in this branch of embroidery, particularly since it was not a regular area of his business.

Magoulet's subcontracting agreement of 1708 does not indicate exactly how Martin, Pimedde and Aublé organised the completion of their work. Given the large quantities stipulated in the contract, it is likely that they in turn would also have subcontracted the work out to other local embroiderers, just as Duhamel did. The latter's bankruptcy file of 1749 documents another substantial subcontracting system, with debts being owed to 31 embroiderers who worked for him.²⁴ Of these individuals, 25 were male master embroiderers and six were women. Again, these master embroiderers probably distributed their work from Duhamel to other workers still. The sizes of subcontracting networks in the embroidery trade were nevertheless varied. Duhamel's was large

²³ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 26.

²⁴ ADP D4/B6/Cart.8/Dossier 408: 'Etienne Marcel Duhamel', 6 October 1749.

compared with others which were in operation over the course of the century. A bankruptcy record for Louis Trouillebert, also a master embroiderer, in 1789 reveals his debts to just three embroiderers. Yet in addition to the three named embroiderers, he also owed 400 *livres* to ‘the workers at my home’, further evidence that the domestic workshop was not an adequate production framework for meeting consumer demand.²⁵ Duhamel and others regularly supplied a courtly clientele with gold and silver embroidery for court suits, dresses and other accessories required for appearance at court. The nobility counted for just 3 percent of the Parisian population during this period, but as the previous chapters have demonstrated, they constituted the main consumer base for this type of embroidery during the eighteenth century.²⁶ Court appearances were frequent and each visit demanded a new piece of embroidery, yet such embroidery was both costly and time-consuming to produce.²⁷ Duhamel’s large subcontracting network was necessary to meet this level of consumer demand.

The following section will analyse how when faced with the consumer credit relations and extensive subcontracting networks examined above, the embroiderers of eighteenth-century Paris found themselves operating on the margins of guild jurisdiction in order to satisfy consumer demand and to ensure their own economic survival. It will also suggest that the independence of women as non-guild workers was essential to supplying the market for embroidery.

5.3 Production on the Margins: *Faux Ouvriers*

In theory, the guild of embroiderers in Paris regulated how production was organised and issued numerous stipulations and restrictions over to whom master embroiderers and privileged court embroiderers could give work.²⁸ Master and privileged embroiderers were not to distribute work outside of their home to journeymen. Privileged embroiderers could only distribute work to other privileged embroiderers or master embroiderers, and master embroiderers could only distribute work to their sons and daughters, and other

²⁵ ADP D4/B6/Cart.106/Dossier 7519.

²⁶ Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 76.

²⁷ Chrisman-Campbell, *Fashion Victims*, p. 94.

²⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis for an analysis of the theoretical discourse of the guild and the regulations governing production organisation.

master embroiderers. In practice, this was difficult to police, since once the work had been given out, the individual had no control thereafter over how, where, or by whom the work was completed.

The subcontracting networks examined in this chapter evidence the difficulty which the guild would have had in enforcing its policies, since Magoulet and other privileged embroiderers had limited control over the subcontraction of work by master embroiderers. Archival evidence in the form of legal cases suggests that an extensive parallel production framework operated on the margins of guild jurisdiction throughout the eighteenth century. This took the form of master and privileged embroiderers subcontracting work out to false workers (*faux ouvriers*) or unskilled workers (*ouvriers sans qualité*) who worked in the so-called privileged areas of Paris (*fauxbourgs privilégiés*), a practice forbidden by guild regulations.²⁹ Moreover and most importantly for this study, the majority of the *faux ouvriers* were women. Evidence of this can be found in lawsuits brought by the guild against master embroiderers who had been found to be distributing work to these individuals, either in Paris or in the privileged areas on the outskirts of Paris.³⁰ These were workers without apprenticeship or guild membership, and who operated mainly out of the privileged areas in and around Paris, the most famous of which was the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, located in the east of the city (figure 5.3).

Individuals in these areas had been granted the right to practise craft trades without guild membership or apprenticeship by a royal decree issued in 1657, yet they were not permitted to sell their products outside of these areas. The privileged areas were outside of guild jurisdiction, and were places where workers had the liberty of operating

²⁹ The terms *faux ouvriers* and *ouvriers sans qualité* were used interchangeably by the guild across a variety of legal documents. Both terms denote workers who were working outside of the guild and who had not completed a guild-approved apprenticeship. These workers will hereafter be generally referred to as *faux ouvriers* throughout this chapter, except when they are specifically referred to as *ouvriers sans qualité* in the referenced documentation.

³⁰ See for example BN F-21151 (29) and BN F-21149 (25). A survey of legal cases brought by the guild between 1686 and 1739 demonstrates that out of 52 cases, 31 of these involved the employment of *ouvriers sans qualité* by master embroiderers; out of these 31 cases, 28 of the workers were women. From 1740 onwards, there are no further legal cases but this does not necessarily mean that none were brought; the reason being is that the nature of the documents in this archive series from 1740 onwards changes, suggesting that the legal cases have been stored elsewhere. See AN Y 9372-9396b.

freely, unconfined by guild regulations. Here, the *jurés* of the guild were not able to exercise their full inspection rights, nor were guild members permitted to live there or distribute work to its residents. Evidence of the guild's anxiety about the privileged areas of Paris was written clearly into their regulations: master embroiderers were forbidden to reside in these areas and if found to be doing so, they would be stripped of their mastership, lose their guild membership, and pay a fine of 30 *livres*. In addition, sons of masters and journeymen found to be living and working in the privileged areas of Paris were refused access to the mastership.

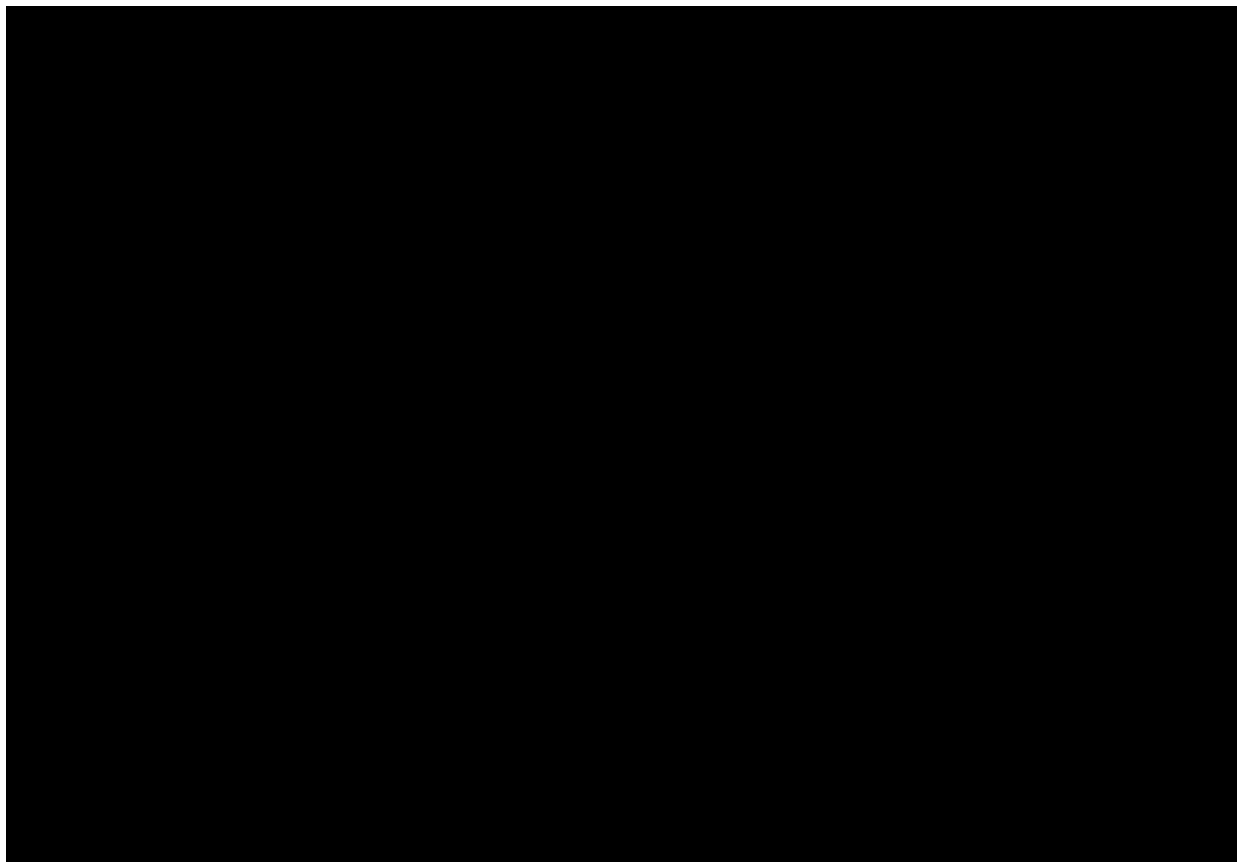


Figure 5.3. M. Bonne, Map of Paris showing the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, 1770.
Available from *Cartothèque numérique de la Société d'Histoire de Nanterre* <<http://histoire-nanterre.org>> [last accessed 19 April 2019].

In reality, embroiderers from a range of occupational ranks engaged with illegal production in some form, and it was not just the domain of rogue master embroiderers. For example, Louis Jacques Balzac, embroiderer to the king, subcontracted work to the widow Duport in 1755, who was an embroideress in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. In this particular case, Balzac had subcontracted the embroidery of the Dauphin's waistcoat,

which the *jurés* of the guild had seized, to the widow Duport who ran an embroidery workshop in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Whilst the guild attempted to prosecute Balzac for contravening the regulations, it was not successful in doing so due to Balzac's position as a privileged court embroiderer and the fact that the intended customer of the embroidered waistcoat was the Dauphin. Jean-Baptiste Foin on the other hand, was not so lucky: a master embroiderer implicated in the same case, Foin had similarly colluded with Duport in the production of embroidered waistcoats, yet because of his rank as simple master, he was found guilty of the offence.³¹ Privileged and master embroiderers were evidently willing to risk subcontracting their work out to those residing in the privileged areas of Paris, where they were able to draw upon a large pool of labour. Workers in these areas were able to produce embroidery at a lower cost than those working within the guild-regulated areas of the city. By not paying guild fees and being able to set up a workshop without needing to adhere to guild regulations, embroiderers in the privileged areas were able to meet consumer demand for courtly etiquette quickly and efficiently.

It can thus be argued that it was the very nature of the guild regulations which perpetuated illegal production in the privileged areas. Exclusion from guild membership and apprenticeship pushed many female workers into the parallel illegal production framework of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and many master and privileged embroiderers subverted guild regulations by distributing work to them. Evidence from the early eighteenth century indicates that most of the legal cases brought by the Paris guild of embroiderers were against master embroiderers who had been found illegally employing the services of *ouvriers sans qualité* in the privileged areas of Paris. Of the surviving 52 legal cases brought against master embroiderers by the *jurés* of the Paris guild in the years 1686-1739, 31 of these involved *ouvriers sans qualité*.³²

There is clearly a discrepancy between how the guild presented itself and how the trade was actually organised. As we have seen, the official discourse of the guild, such as discussions around contraventions of the guild regulations, and texts such as Saint-

³¹ BNF 4 Z 2309 INV 2401 FA: 'Mémoire', 1755.

³² As explained in the introduction to this chapter, there are no further legal cases in these files after this period so it is not possible to say for certain whether this pattern continued throughout the eighteenth century. However, the nature of the documents in this archive series changes halfway through the century which suggests that the legal cases have been stored elsewhere. See AN Y 9372-9396b.

Aubin's *L'Art du brodeur*, promoted a certain ideal of production, in which embroidery was completed in a domestic setting by a master embroiderer and his family. The image that the guild promoted was one in which the male master embroiderer, who was highly skilled, retained control over the production process and particularly over his female workers. Furthermore, the guild attempted to block petitions by women to be admitted to the guild by emphasising that it had always been an all-male guild and insisted that the reception of a female master would lead to confusion which would not only degenerate the art of embroidery, but also threaten the wellbeing of the State. It argued further that women were 'incapable of directing a work and guiding a design' independently of male supervision.³³ If women were not permitted to become masters themselves in theory, they could not independently take on embroidery commissions from anyone outside of their home – they would have to rely on their husband or father as a master embroiderer to obtain the commission which would then be distributed to them.

In practice, however, women were extremely skilled workers and able to autonomously produce the highest quality work, and this was the case in both Paris and Lyon. In order for them to do so successfully in Paris, they had to operate on the margins of guild jurisdiction. A legal case from the mid-eighteenth century evidences this fact. A 1755 petition records the legal action taken by the guild in the aforementioned case in which a waistcoat for the Dauphin had been given to the widow Duport by Balzac to embroider. When the *jurés* of the guild inspected her premises, they found that Duport, along with at least four other *ouvriers sans qualité*, were running 'a considerable embroidery business in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, since the widow Duport alone had twenty-eight embroidery frames set up, and was running an Embroidery Academy'.³⁴ The number of embroidery frames was indeed considerable: other legal cases document the seizure of

³³ 'incapables de diriger un ouvrage et de conduire un dessein'. AN E 1514/A: 'Arrêt simple – admission d'une femme dans la communauté des brodeurs - Marie-Marthe Ringard (veuve Neuville), Fille du Sieur Ringard, Maître Brodeur', 2 May 1775. See also AN E 1512/21: 'Arrêt simple sur requête par grâce, défaut de brevet d'apprentissage – Admission d'une femme dans une communauté de métier - La demoiselle (Thérèse) Boyer', 14 March 1775; AN E/1520 (3): 'Arrêt simple – admission d'une femme dans la communauté des brodeurs – Jeanne Louise Denin, femme de Jacques Martin D'Orange', 7 November 1775.

³⁴ 'un commerce considerable de Broderie dans le Fauxbourg Saint-Antoine, puisque la veuve Duport avoit seule vingt-huit métiers de montés, & tenoit Académie de Broderie'. BNF 4 Z 2309 INV 2401 FA: 'Mémoire', 1755, p. 6.

between just one and three embroidery frames in similar inspections. This, along with her ‘embroidery academy’, suggests that Duport herself was employing a large number of workers, all of whom were presumably working on commissions subcontracted to her by both master and privileged court embroiderers. Moreover, it suggests that as a woman, Duport was capable of directing work and overseeing the execution of an embroidered design, contrary to what the guild argued in 1775. Such opportunities were not possible within guild jurisdiction. Whilst widows of master embroiderers were permitted to carry on their husband’s business (unless they remarried), they were not allowed to take on new apprentices.³⁵ Away from guild restrictions, then, women like Duport were able to profit from consumer demand, and it was the flexibility of the privileged areas which enabled them to do so.

5.4 Production on the Margins: *Faux* Gold and Silver, Real Skill

In 1718 the Paris guild stated that the embroidery trade was being continually encroached upon by the *ouvriers sans qualité* who ‘deceive the public with impunity by the defective work which they produce’.³⁶ Not only was it illegal for those working in the privileged areas of Paris to practise embroidery, but it was the practice of embroidering with false gold and silver which was deemed to be particularly problematic, both by the guild and by the crown. Members of the guild were prohibited from employing false gold and silver in the same work as real gold and silver in order to protect consumer interests and reduce the amount of ‘inferior’ embroidery on the market. Article 40 underlines the gravity of such an offence: those who were found to be in contravention were to have the work in question seized and burned in front of the guild headquarters, with an added 200 *livres* fine and 50 *livres* in damages and interests to be paid to the *jurés*. If an embroiderer reoffended, he would be subject to an undisclosed penalty to be decided at the discretion of the *jurés*. However, in the privileged areas, where the guild did not have the jurisdiction

³⁵ Jacques Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce, contenant tout ce qui concerne le commerce qui se fait dans les quatre parties du monde, ouvrage posthume du Sr Jacques Savary Des Bruslons continue et donné au public, par Philémon-Louis Savary* (Genève: les héritiers Cramer et les frères Philibert, 1744), p. 560.

³⁶ ‘trompent impunement le public, par les ouvrages defectueux qu’ils font’, *Lettres patentes portant confirmation des statuts et ordonnances des maîtres brodeurs, découpeurs, égratigneurs, chasubliers de la ville, fauxbourgs & banlieue de Paris, 1718* (Paris: Impr. De Valleyre, 1758), p. 57.

to police and regulate work, this type of fraud was prevalent and it was particularly widespread due to the fact that it was almost impossible to detect the offence once a piece of work had been finished.³⁷ As a result, those residing in the privileged areas were prohibited from working with gold or silver material at all, whether real or false. This authority was upheld by the royal government by an *Arrêt du Conseil* issued in 1691 which prohibited workers in the privileged areas from working with the materials of gold and silver in any trade.³⁸

In 1752 an *Arrêt de la cour des monnaies* documents that three embroiderers were found guilty of working with gold and silver in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Their work was confiscated and they were ordered to move back to the town (Paris) and pay a fine of 10 *livres*.³⁹ Nevertheless, a fine of 10 *livres* was very modest during this period and this low fine suggests that offences such as these were both common and difficult to eradicate. In 1754 a similar issue arose and the guild of embroiderers filed a lawsuit against a group of *ouvriers sans qualité* for producing gold and silver embroidery, some of which was found to be false. This time, however, the *ouvriers sans qualité* challenged the issue of production ownership and privilege, claiming that they had the right to practise embroidery as per the *Lettres Patentes* of 1657. However, the arguments of the *ouvriers sans qualité* were rejected in favour of the guild due both to the aforementioned decree of 1691, and Statute 10 of the guild regulations of 1718 which prohibited master embroiderers and journeymen from practising their trade in the privileged areas or giving any work to those who lived in these areas.

It was not just in Paris that the practice of embroidering with false gold and silver proved problematic. In Lyon, too, thirty years later the *Grande Fabrique* (the Lyon silk-weaving guild) deemed it necessary to take action against the Lyonnais embroiderers, who were not organised into a guild. After a petition put forward by the *Syndics Jurés-Gardes* of the *Grande Fabrique* in September 1784, an *Arrêt de la cour du parlement* was issued in

³⁷ BNF 4 Z 2309 INV 2401 FA: 'Mémoire', 1755, p. 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Arrêt de la cour des monnaies qui fait défenses à la veuve Dimanche et au nommé Buisseur et sa femme, ouvriers brodeurs, de travailler en or et en argent dans le faubourg Saint-Antoine ; confisque les ouvrages sur eux saisis, leur enjoint de se retirer dans la ville et les condamne chacun en 10 livres d'amende* (Paris: Impr. Royale, 1752). See also *Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat qui ordonne que sans s'arrêter à la demande portée au parlement par les religieuses de Saint Antoine, sur une saisie faite dans le faubourg par les jurés brodeurs, les parties continueront de procéder en la cour des monnaies* (Paris: Impr. de Dumesnil, 1751).

December that year, making the embroiderers subject to Article 8 of the 1744 statutes of the *Grande Fabrique*. This article specifically prohibited the use of false *dorure* (metal threads), and the mixing of false and genuine *dorure* in works of embroidery on silk on pain of a 3,000 *livres* fine.⁴⁰ The *Arrêt* stated that such a measure was necessary as a result of fraudulent activity. The *Grande Fabrique* cited its motivation for changing its statutes as being the rise in popularity of embroidered textiles and the decline in production of brocaded silks. The *Grande Fabrique* argued that since embroidery had all but replaced brocaded silks, embroidery should be subject to the same regulations that brocaded silks had been, and that the regulations should thus reflect the current fashions in textile design.⁴¹ Further, that ‘silk has always been exclusively intended for fine gold’ and embroidery should not be exempt from the same regulations.⁴² Most importantly, the guild warned that if such contraventions were not brought under control by law, consumers would soon lose confidence in Lyonnais products.

The Paris guild argued that the *faux ouvriers* were producing defective work, yet at the same time decried the fact that it was near impossible to detect this so-called ‘fraud’ and even referred to the deception as ‘art’. Such a contradiction suggests that the *faux ouvriers* were, in fact, highly skilled workers. Indeed, Balzac would not have entrusted the widow Duport to embroider a waistcoat for his most important client, the Dauphin, had she been an ‘unskilled’ worker in the most literal sense of the word. An unskilled worker would not have been able to produce work to the standard that it could be mistaken for a piece of real gold or silver embroidery. In order for the *faux ouvriers* to produce gold and silver embroidery which was of a high enough standard to be considered good enough for the Dauphin and to produce work that could not be detected by even a ‘connoisseur’, they would have had to have undergone a significant period of training. Gold and silver embroidery, whether real or false, was one of the most skilful forms of embroidery, the masterpiece required for admittance to the rank of guild master being a piece of shaded gold embroidery. The gold and silver used in embroidery was a combination of gilded wires and cord which were of varying weights. They were difficult to manipulate and care had to be taken during the production process to ensure that they did not become tarnished whilst being worked into the design. This knowledge and skill could only be acquired by learning from another experienced embroiderer.

⁴⁰ AM HH 199/Chappe VII: ‘Arrêt de la Cour de Parlement’, 7 December 1784.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴² ‘la soie a été exclusivement destinée à recevoir les dorures fines’, *ibid.*

Here again, the theoretical jurisdiction of the guild was not an adequate production framework for embroidered clothing. As noted in the previous chapter, the statutes of the guild were particularly problematic for the training of the next generation of professional embroiderers for most of the eighteenth century. Until 1757, they stipulated that master embroiderers could only take on a (male) apprentice when guild membership did not exceed 200 masters, and that a master could only employ an apprentice once every 10 years. Indeed, the royal government recognised the inadequacy of such a system when it issued a decree to relax these rules as a result of increased consumer demand.⁴³ It is therefore highly likely that workers in the privileged areas were informally trained by master embroiderers or their widows in contravention of the guild regulations. The case of the Dauphin's waistcoat illustrates the extent of the 'illicit' transmission of skill in the embroidery trade.⁴⁴ When the *jurés* of the guild visited the widow Duport's home, not only did they find 'illegal' embroidery which had been made with false gold and silver, but they also found Duport to be running an embroidery 'Academy'. Admitting that the embroidery work that had been seized was indeed of 'fake' gold and silver, Duport insisted that this work had only been intended to be used in the instruction of her students, and that it was essential to the running of her academy.⁴⁵ The presence of informal training networks is convincing if we are to take into consideration the fact that the majority of the *faux ouvriers* were women.

5.5 *Faux* Gold and Silver: Materiality

The evidence examined above suggests that there was a market for gold and silver embroidery – or at least the look of gold and silver embroidery – in the mid-eighteenth century which was being illicitly supplied by workers in the privileged areas of Paris. In *L'Art du brodeur*, Saint-Aubin tells us that 'today, one wants everything to sparkle,' and further, that 'hardly a year goes by that someone does not invent little novelties that

⁴³ *Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat du Roi, qui contient règlement concernant les apprentissages du métier de Brodeur. Extrait des registres du Conseil d'Etat* (Paris: Impr. Royale, 1758).

⁴⁴ 'Illicit' here is taken to mean any activity which took place outside of guild jurisdiction, where the guild existed (i.e. Paris).

⁴⁵ BNF 4 Z 2309 INV 2401 FA: 'Mémoire', 1755, p. 6.

fashion adopts and then successively discards.⁴⁶ The presence of clandestine embroidery production, as evidenced through legal cases and the relevant statutes in the guild regulations, indicated a need to meet this particular demand – hence the use of gold and silver. Historians have suggested that areas such as the Faubourg Saint-Antoine were places where innovation and new methods of production were able to flourish as a result of the freedom that these workers enjoyed.⁴⁷ Yet evidence from the embroidery trade, such as legal cases, signals that embroidery in its most traditional and ostentatious form – gold and silver embroidery for court clothing – was also being produced in these areas.

It was the very nature of consumer demand for courtly etiquette which encouraged clandestine embroidery production in eighteenth-century Paris. Customers who ordered embroidered clothing for court appearances did so frequently and on long terms of credit. Professional embroiderers were thus caught in a cycle of needing to acquire costly materials, which they did so on credit, and supply a succession of embroidered court clothing, which, due to the nature of the materials, was time-consuming and labour-intensive to produce. For embroiderers, the largest cost encountered in production was for primary materials, such as gold and silver thread, *cordon* (gold cord), and *frisure* (a type of coiled gold wire). Table 5.1 shows the prices for different types of gold that were used in embroidery.

⁴⁶ ‘aujourd’hui on veut tout brillant’; ‘il ne se passe guere des années qu’on n’invente quelques petites nouveautés que la mode adopte & réforme tour-à-tour.’ Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 14 and p. 21.

⁴⁷ See for example Steven L. Kaplan, ‘Les corporations, les ‘faux ouvriers’ et le faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVIIIe siècle’, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 43/2 (1988), 353-78.

| Prices in 1769 | <i>Livres le marc</i> ⁴⁸ |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <i>L'or double surdoré</i> (gold double thread) | 96 |
| <i>L'or surdoré</i> (gilded gold) | 88 |
| <i>L'or à passer</i> (gold for passing/satin stitch) | 82 |
| <i>L'or pâle ou veiné</i> (pale or grained gold) | 72 |
| <i>L'or verd, rouge, et bleu</i> (green, red, and blue gold) | 82 |
| <i>L'or frisé</i> (crimped gold) | 80 |
| <i>L'or cordon</i> (gold cord) | 84 |
| <i>L'or de Lyon</i> (Lyons gold) | 72 |
| <i>L'or de Milan</i> (Milan gold) | 68 |
| <i>L'or rebours</i> (reverse gold) [twisted to the left] | 75 |

Table 5.1. Prices for types of gold used in embroidery. Source: Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur* (1770), p. 38.

⁴⁸ 'Le marc' is a measurement of weight used in the eighteenth century for a range of goods, but particularly gold and silver. One *marc* was equal to 8 ounces. See the entry for 'marc' in Diderot and d'Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie*, pp. 10:81-2.



Figure 5.4a. Waistcoat, gold and silver embroidery on satin, France, 1730-39. 408-1882.
© Victoria and Albert Museum.

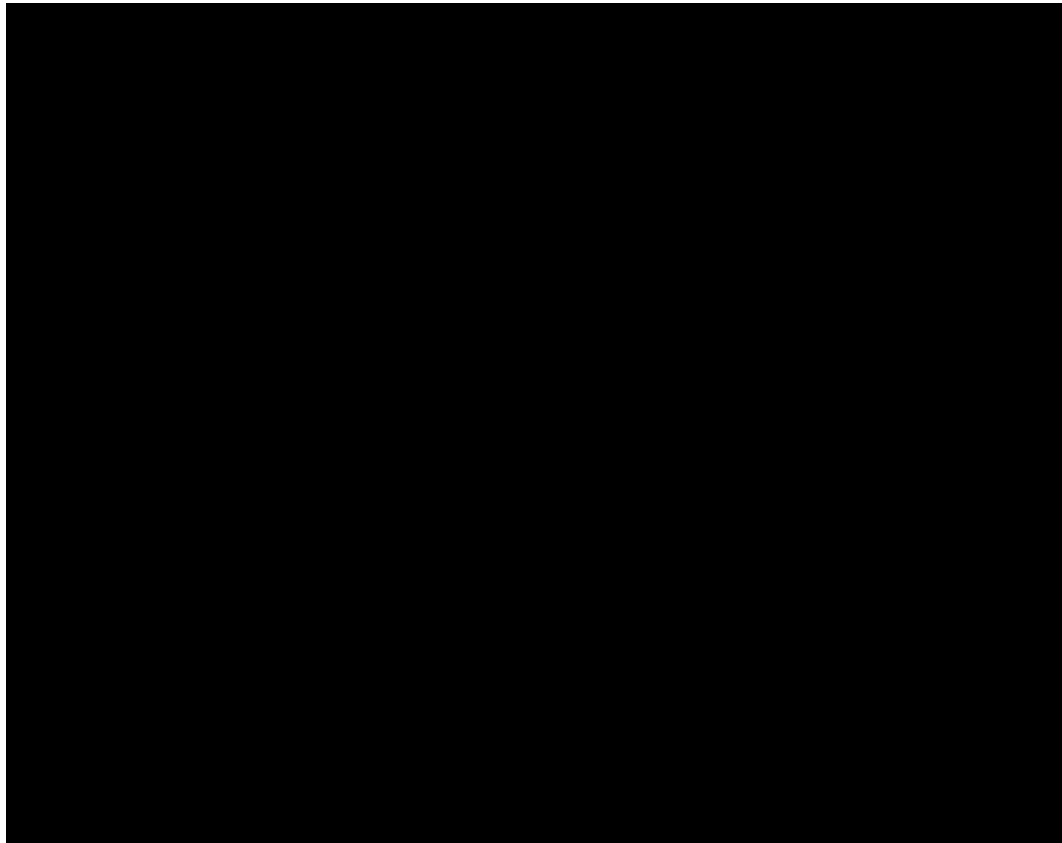


Figure 5.4b. Detail of waistcoat, gold and silver embroidery on satin, France, 1730-39.
408-1882. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Embroiderers would typically use a combination of the different types of gold described in table 5.1 which when combined, produced an effect similar to that on a waistcoat from forty years before (figures 5.4a and 5.4b). This waistcoat, made of white satin and richly embroidered in gold, silver and spangles, was likely produced in France during the 1730s. The entire front surface of the waistcoat is embroidered, leaving barely any of the fabric beneath visible. A floral pattern of leaves and flowers has been embroidered in what appears to be a combination of gold for passing or satin stitch (*l'or à passer*), crimped gold (*l'or frisé*), as well as silver spangles. The spaces in between the design having been completely embroidered in silver thread. The embroidery technique used to produce the design is couching, a technique whereby lengths of thread are laid down upon a surface and held in place by tiny threads of either the same or different thread. The 'anchor' threads can be of a similar or contrasting colour, depending on the desired effect. On this particular waistcoat, the embroiderer has used very fine silk threads in similar colours to the metal threads (white silk for the silver threads and yellow silk for the silver-gilt threads), ingeniously concealing where the metal threads are being held in place. The way in which the silk threads have been blended with the metal threads to

conceal their presence, as well as the extent of the design, is an example of the high-quality workmanship which was carried out by professional embroiderers during the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the fact that the embroidery covers almost the entire surface of the waistcoat and the rich materials used to enhance the sumptuous effect of the design, point to the costly nature of this particular garment. In his treatise on embroidery, Saint-Aubin tells us that ‘in general, couching is the most common and least sturdy of Embroideries. It has a smooth surface and spoils easily’.⁴⁹

Those who could afford to spend money on a luxury embellishment which Saint-Aubin indicates was extremely delicate and had a potentially short shelf-life, were likely to have occupied the higher ranks of society during this period. It would have been worn to a glamorous court event, such as a ball, with the dazzling effect of the metal and spangle embroidery enhanced by the candlelight in a palatial environment, such as that of Versailles. For embroidery such as this, the materials constituted around 85 percent of the total cost of production. Other costs incurred during the production process included pattern taking (*prendre la taille*), which consisted of placing the item to be embroidered onto a piece of white paper which was then pricked with a needle according to the outline of the garment; and pattern making (*faire la taille*), whereby the design to be embroidered would be pricked and then pounced.⁵⁰ Embroiderers employed the services of pattern drawers to make and prick their patterns,⁵¹ and this cost around 3-4 *livres*. Labour – the actual embroidering – cost just 5-15 percent of the final product. For smaller and less elaborate products, such as stockings, labour could cost as little as 2 percent.

These calculations are based on the daybook of Megret, a master embroiderer from Paris whose main business during the years 1720-26 was gold and silver embroidery for men’s suits, waistcoats and stockings.⁵² The idiosyncratic nature of his accounting

⁴⁹ ‘En général, la couchure est la plus commune & la moins solide des Broderies ; elle se dégauchit & s’altère facilement’. Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*. p. 18.

⁵⁰ Pouncing is the process of transferring the pattern onto the material ready to be embroidered. The paper design was lain over the material and then a pounce bag was used to rub a small amount of powder (such as charcoal) over the pinpricks. The powder fell through the pinpricks onto the material underneath, thus transferring the outline of the design. Ink was then used to join up the pinprick marks to create an outline of the design to be embroidered. See Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, pp. 5-6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

⁵² ADP D5/B6/Reg. 591 (greffe 123).

methods, as well as discrepancies in how he recorded the costs for similar products, make it impossible to arrive at fixed costs for embroidery materials. Nevertheless, in general, the procurement of materials constituted a significant cost for embroiderers. It is thus no surprise that the gold wiredrawers (*tireurs d'or*) frequently appeared in the list of creditors in the bankruptcy records of professional embroiderers in eighteenth-century Paris. Duhamel for example had outstanding debts of 48,814 *livres* owed to his workers and suppliers, of which he owed 15,264 *livres* 10 *sols* to a single gold wiredrawer in the rue Saint Denis, that is 31 percent of his total debts. For his part, Balzac, embroiderer to the king, owed 3,780 *livres* to a merchant gold wiredrawer (*marchand tireur d'or*) in 1763,⁵³ and in 1789, another Parisian master embroiderer, Trouillebert, counted five tailors, 12 second-hand dealers, six silk merchants (*marchands d'étoffes de soie*), one goldsmith (*orphèvre*), one merchant gilder (*marchand de dorure*), and five gold dealers (*marchands d'or*) among his creditors. These supplier credit networks demonstrate the precarious financial situation of embroiderers who were required to purchase costly materials in advance of payment.

Embroiderers in the privileged areas were thus able to produce embroidery which resembled gold and silver for a much lower cost, since as the guild argued, it was impossible to detect the fraud of false gold or silver in a finished piece of embroidery. False gold was made of gilded copper wire and cost from 10-24 *livres le marc*.⁵⁴ False gold cost around 80-85 percent less than real gold in comparison with the price of real gold for embroidery in table 5.1. It is therefore unsurprising that the guild of embroiderers objected so much to this form of production. In the absence of evidence to confirm this, it is not possible to say whether the savings of false gold and silver were passed on to the end consumer. It can be speculated, however, that the use of the false material was concealed in order to increase the embroiderers' profit. The aforementioned petition from 1755 again repeats the 'deception' that could be caused by this practice, stating that 'The most common contravention in Embroidery is the mixing of the false with the fine, which is done in so many ways and with such skill that even the most experienced Connoisseurs are fooled. [...] the contravention is almost inevitable, & all the more dangerous, since once the work is finished, it is almost impossible to perceive it.'⁵⁵ The

⁵³ ADP D5/B6/reg.699.

⁵⁴ Saint-Aubin, *L'Art du brodeur*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ 'La contravention la plus commune dans la Broderie, est le mélange du faux avec le fin, qui se fait de tant de façons & avec tant d'adresse, que les plus grands Connoisseurs y sont trompés.

bias of this source should nevertheless be taken into account. If the ‘contravention’ was impossible to detect, the question should be asked, who exactly was the victim of the so-called fraud? The fact that such fraud went unnoticed once the piece was finished firstly suggests that consumers did not have the requisite knowledge to accurately assess the materiality of false gold or silver. Indeed, as the guild protested, even the most ‘experienced connoisseur’ could be fooled. Secondly, it suggests that consumers could not have been bothered how or by whom their embroidery was made. Perhaps they even desired this form of embroidery, that it was enough for their embroidery to reflect the glittering candlelight of Versailles.⁵⁶

One of the key differences between false and real gold which affected its price, was the weight. This is an important factor to consider within the context of consumption. Elaborately embroidered court clothing in real gold and silver was relatively heavy and uncomfortable to wear for long periods.⁵⁷ Writing on 19 February 1715 for example, the Persian Ambassador observed that during one court appearance, Louis XIV ‘wore a suit of gold and black material, embroidered with diamonds; it was thought to cost 12,500,000 *livres*, and the suit was so heavy that the king changed as soon as he had finished dinner. [...]’.⁵⁸ Whilst the king’s suit was embroidered with diamonds, it is likely that it also incorporated gold and silver, and this example alludes to not only the expense, but also the uncomfortable nature of wearing the ostentatious luxury required by the court. Almost half a century later in April 1760, Balzac embroidered two suits for an aristocratic customer, one in gold and diamonds and one in silver and diamonds. Balzac

[...] la contravention est presque inévitable, & d’autant plus dangereuse, que l’ouvrage fini, il est presque impossible de s’en apercevoir.’ BNF 4 Z 2309 INV 2401 FA: ‘Mémoire’, 1755, p. 5.

⁵⁶ This is speculation, since no evidence has been found to date which indicates the consumer’s awareness of the production of false gold and silver embroidery, or indeed their perception of it.

⁵⁷ Aileen Ribeiro has similarly noted that men’s clothing during this period was uncomfortable to wear due to the weight of not only surface decoration such as embroidery, but also the linings in the many side pleats of the coat, for example. See Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe: 1715-1789* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 24.

⁵⁸ ‘prit un habit d’une étoffe or et noir, brodé de diamants ; il y en avoit pour 12,500,000 livres, et l’habit étoit si pesant que le roi en changea aussitôt après son diner. [...]’ Quoted in Pascale Gorguet Ballesteros, ‘Usages vestimentaires et jeux de regards à Versailles’, in *Visiteurs de Versailles: Voyageurs, Princes, Ambassadeurs 1682-1789*, ed. by Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide and Bertrand Rondot (Paris: Gallimard/Château de Versailles, 2018), pp. 68-77 (pp. 71-2).

recorded that the embroidery for each weighed 64 ounces, not including the ground material (which was not specified).⁵⁹ In contrast, Saint-Aubin tells us that ‘false gold is used to make the same things which are made with real gold’, thus suggesting that it was only the material which was being substituted, and not necessarily the quality or skill.⁶⁰ The lower cost was not the only advantage of commissioning a garment embroidered with false gold or silver; it could also be physically more comfortable. It could therefore be argued that this type of embroidery produced in the privileged areas of Paris enabled wealthy customers to adhere to the sartorial etiquette of the court, whilst not having to endure the associated weight of authentic gold or silver.

The number of foreign visitors to Paris could also explain the prevalence of clandestine production. The court of Versailles attracted numerous visitors each year, since it was not always necessary to have a personal invitation from the king. Versailles was a relatively ‘open’ court, and foreign travellers visited to observe the royal public rituals. As such, visitors stopped in Paris for a few days before making their way to Versailles, and during this time they acquired the clothing necessary to conform to the sartorial etiquette of the French court. Clandestine production of false gold and silver would have been a way to supply foreign visitors with the embroidered court clothing which they demanded at short notice. Since most luxury goods were purchased on credit during this period, and credit relationships depended on trust, it was a risky business to enter into a credit relationship with a customer who was both unknown to the producer and purchasing goods during a period of travel. False gold and silver could therefore have been used by master embroiderers to mitigate the risk associated with lending credit to customers with whom they had had no previous dealings, and with whom they were unlikely to have future dealings as those clients were merely travelling through Paris.⁶¹ Highly mobile clients such as these were even more unlikely to pay for goods if they did not have the cash to pay up front, so the lower costs associated with false gold and silver

⁵⁹ ADP D5/B6/reg.699.

⁶⁰ ‘On fait en faux les mêmes matieres qu’en fin.’ Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 38. Scheuer’s translation, p. 74.

⁶¹ Rebecca L. Spang characterises the credit relations in eighteenth-century France as ‘networks of obligation’: without cash (which was often the case), customers dealt with ‘familiar shopkeepers’ who knew them and felt comfortable to lend them credit. See Rebecca L. Spang, *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 45.

would certainly have seemed attractive to master embroiderers facing this type of uncertainty.

The existence of false gold and silver embroidery continued well into the eighteenth century, with the arguments of the guild being repeated and reinforced in 1765. For example, a legal document from 17 July 1765 detailed the concerns of the guild of the ‘abuses, frauds and embezzlements which are committed daily by a large number of unskilled workers who take refuge in the privileged areas’.⁶² These ‘abuses’ were once again the mixing of false and real precious materials in their works of embroidery ‘with so much art that it takes a perfect connoisseur to recognise the deception once works are newly done, the public find themselves duped, seduced by the cheap price’.⁶³ Yet by 1776, the royal government attempted to regulate the Faubourg Saint-Antoine by issuing a decree which granted the workers of the Faubourg permission to join the Paris guilds for a fee reduced by 50 percent, which would be paid to the crown rather than the guilds. In the same document, it lifted the ban on the commercial activities of the workers by granting them permission to sell their products within the city of Paris and its faubourgs, free from inspection.⁶⁴ Such a move suggests that the crown was willing to recognise the work of those in the privileged areas, and their admission to the craft guilds of Paris suggests that these workers were not ‘unskilled’, but possessed the craftsmanship and experience required of guild membership.

5.6 Lyon: Producing Fashion

By the second half of the eighteenth century, a new type of fashionable embroidery had emerged in parallel to the gold and silver embroidery required for court clothing. From the 1770s onwards, the considerable rise in the popularity of embroidered silks was at the expense of brocaded silks, and as the previous chapters of this thesis have demonstrated,

⁶² ‘les abus, fraudes et malversations qui se commettent journellement par un grand nombre d’ouvriers brodeurs sans qualité qui se réfugient dans les lieux privilégiés’. AN Y 9500: ‘Avis du lieutenant général de police et du procureur du roi sur des délibérations des communautés de métiers et l’enregistrement de lettres patentes’, 17 July 1765.

⁶³ ‘avec tant d’art qu’il faut être parfaitement connoisseur pour connoître cette supercherie quants les ouvrages sont nouvellement faits, le public se trouve dupe, séduit par le bon marché’. Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Déclaration du Roi, Portant Règlement en faveur des Ouvriers & Artisans du faubourg Saint-Antoine de Paris, 19 décembre 1776* (Paris: Impr. Royale, 1777).

professionally embroidered waistcoats in a variety of coloured silks were in high demand by the second half of the century. This embroidery, deemed to be more fashionable by consumers, merchants and the commercial fashion press of the time, was produced predominantly in Lyon.⁶⁵ In contrast to Paris, embroidery in Lyon during this period was an unregulated, or ‘free’, trade. No guild regulated production.⁶⁶ The relative freedom that the embroiderers enjoyed allowed them to keep up with the fluctuations in fashion in the textile industry during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The trade in Lyon thus mirrored the flexibility of the privileged areas of Paris and the independence of female workers in particular enabled the embroidery trade to satisfy consumer demand.

The popularity of embroidered silk waistcoats in particular is evidenced by the fact that many silk merchants chose to internalise the production of embroidery within their own businesses, rather than subcontracting it to the market. The directory *Indicateur alphabétique de Lyon* (1788) for example listed the local services offered at merchant level and out of 30 of those related to the embroidery trade, over half were listed as embroidery merchants (*marchands de broderies* or *marchands brodeurs*), rather than embroiderers/embroideresses, indicating the commercial interest of the silk merchants in embroidery in the last decades of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ These businesses were concentrated around the commercial centre of Lyon, the *presqu’île*.⁶⁸ Some employed embroiderers to work for them on their premises. The correspondence of the silk merchant-manufacturer Fiard indicates that he employed a number of people, including family members and non-relations, who worked for his ‘shop’.⁶⁹ This was a convenient way for silk merchants to ensure the regularity of orders and regulate quality. This can further be attributed to new modes of consuming in the second half of the eighteenth century. One way in which to measure the difference between the two types of consumption is through an analysis of what different merchants in Lyon and Paris

⁶⁵ See Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

⁶⁶ For a comparative analysis of the guild and non-guild regulated aspects of the embroidery trade in eighteenth-century Paris and Lyon, see Chapter 4.

⁶⁷ *Indicateur alphabétique de Lyon* (Lyon: Aimé Delaroche, 1788).

⁶⁸ Most shops were located in this area during the eighteenth century, with a concentration of workshops and other commercial premises. See Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Societe d’Edition Les Belles Lettres, 1970) and Françoise Bayard, *Vivre à Lyon sous l’ancien régime* (Perrin, 1997).

⁶⁹ ADR 8 B 876/28: ‘Copies de lettres envoys’.

stocked. The inventory for Villoud, Cadet et Cie, for example, shows that some Lyonnais silk merchants commissioned hundreds of ready-made embroidered waistcoat panels, as this particular merchant recorded 1,723 orders in 1788 alone. This stands in stark contrast to the 1773 inventory of the Paris-based Boursier brothers, who stocked just 17 embroidered suits in gold, silver and silk.⁷⁰ The bankruptcy records of Villoud also demonstrate the discrepancy in prices between fashionable embroidery, and the gold and silver embroidery of court clothing. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, embroidered waistcoats from Lyon, which were mostly produced with coloured silks, sold for a fraction of the price of the gold and silver embroidered waistcoats produced in Paris, which could reach into the hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of *livres*. It is evident from the bankruptcy records of Lyonnais embroidery merchants that the trade in Lyon profited from this new consumer demand.

One type of embroidery that was particularly popular among consumers of embroidered waistcoats was tambour embroidery. Chapter 3 showed how waistcoats with tambour embroidery were cheaper and faster to produce than other methods of embroidery, and constituted products which were able to successfully meet a rising consumer demand for an increased variety of embroidery designs. Saint-Aubin tells us that the new method of tambouring was ‘just as accurate [as chain-stitch] and six times more expeditious.’⁷¹ Tambour work was thus well-suited to a rising demand for a greater variety of embroidered designs which could be produced and delivered to market quickly and efficiently. The bankruptcy records of Lyonnais embroidery merchants detail not only the large numbers of commissions for tamboured waistcoats, but also the female workers who produced these products. They show that it was women workers specifically who produced this type of embroidery and thus corroborate Saint-Aubin’s assertions that tambour work was ‘women’s work’. In fact, there is no evidence that merchants in Lyon gave work to male embroiderers during this period, and for this type of embroidery. In *L’Art du brodeur* the skill or talent of the female worker is not alluded to in the descriptions of tambour work, and we can deduce that this technique was best suited to a higher volume of output, with Saint-Aubin stating that once the frame is set up, ‘habit does the

⁷⁰ AN MC/ET/XXVII/360: ‘Société entre Antoine-Claude et Alexandre Boursier, frères, marchands merciers [...] pour l’exploitation du fonds de commerce de broderies d’or et d’argent’, 5 juillet 1772. See also Chapter 3.

⁷¹ ‘aussi correct & six fois plus expéditif’. Saint-Aubin, *L’Art du brodeur*, p. 27. Scheuer’s translation, p. 54. ‘as chain-stitch’ is my own insertion.

rest' – i.e. it does not require a great level of skill or concentration.⁷² Most interesting is the glossary to *L'Art du brodeur*: for the entry *Aiguille à chainette* (chain-stitch hook). Saint-Aubin says 'Embroideresses break many needles. The master gives out many needles when he wishes to speed up the Workers or when he wishes to see them keep at their work,' thus evidencing tambour as suitable for producing a larger quantity of products.⁷³ The *Dictionnaire raisonné universel des arts et métiers* (1773) also alluded to the expeditious nature of tambour embroidery, stating that an embroideress was able to tambour a dress in one month. The author comments further that 'it is a shame that the *demoiselles* who seek an occupation, or who are in need of one, do not take it up. What a resource it would be for the poor communities of girls!'⁷⁴

⁷² 'l'habitude fait le reste.' Ibid.

⁷³ 'Les Brodeuses cassent beaucoup d'aiguilles. On donne pour les aiguilles quand on veut hâter les Ouvriers, ou qu'on va les voir travailler.' Ibid., p. 32. Scheuer's translation, p. 64.

⁷⁴ 'C'est dommage que les demoiselles qui demandent de l'occupation, ou qui en ont besoin, ne s'en servent pas. Quelle ressource ne seroit-ce pas pour les pauvres commuanutés de filles!' Pierre Jaubert, *Dictionnaire raisonné universel des arts et métiers: contenant l'histoire, la description, la police des fabriques et manufactures et des pays étrangers: ouvrage utile à tous les citoyens* (Paris: P. Fr. Didot jeune, 1773), II, p. 405.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 5.5a. Waistcoat, silk tambour embroidery on satin, France, c. 1780. MT 27730. ©
MTMAD.

[Image removed due to copyright]

Figure 5.5b. Detail of waistcoat, silk tambour embroidery on satin, France, c. 1780. MT 27730. © MTMAD.

Figures 5.5a and 5.5b show a waistcoat embroidered in coloured silks which is likely to have been produced in Lyon around 1775-85. The design is extremely delicate and reflects the trend for small floral motifs during the later years of the eighteenth century, the embroidery deemed to be of 'fashionable taste'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, it is an example of the type of tamboured waistcoats which were produced in Lyon around this time. The design on this waistcoat is simple and features just one type of stitch: chain stitch, which has been produced using the tambour technique. Villoud's account book for the period 1785-86 contains customer orders for waistcoats such as these and within the same book, the female workers to whom these orders were given to be completed. This is further evidence that women in Lyon had the autonomy to produce embroidery independently. Moreover, the Villoud account books evidence the fact that tambour work sold at a cheaper price and was quicker to produce than other forms of silk embroidery, and certainly gold and silver embroidery. The average price of Balzac's waistcoats

⁷⁵ See for example Chapter 3 of this thesis.

embroidered in silk for example was 80 *livres*, not counting the most expensive which cost 450 *livres*.⁷⁶

| Type | Price |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <i>Tamy</i> (tambour) | 7 <i>livres</i> |
| | 12 <i>livres</i> |
| | 14 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Tamy au couleur</i> (tambour in colours) | 7 <i>livres</i> 10 <i>sols</i> |
| <i>Soye petit point</i> (silk in tent stitch) | 13 <i>livres</i> 10 <i>sols</i> |
| <i>Passé</i> (satin stitch) | 14 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Soye en argent</i> (silk and silver) | 15 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Soye dorure</i> (silk and metal threads) | 15 <i>livres</i> |
| <i>Argent</i> (silver) | 24 <i>livres</i> |

Table 5.2. Prices of embroidered waistcoats sold by Villoud, Cadet et Cie, 1785-88.

Source: 8 B 1280/1-2.

After the customer orders, there is a page dedicated to each embroideress' account: it should be noted that they are all women, there are no male embroiderers in the accounts of this business. On each page we find a woman's name and her allocated number (which is also used in the account books to signal which orders had been given to which worker), along with the orders given to her and completed work received, as well as prices. In this study, these are taken to mean the piece rates which she has been paid. We can see from this table here, the prices that Villoud paid their embroideresses per commission:

⁷⁶ Balzac's waistcoats embroidered in silk and gold were even more expensive, fetching up to 640 *livres*. See ADP D5/B6/reg.699 and Chapter 3 of this thesis.

| Type | Price |
|---------------------|------------------|
| <i>Gillet satin</i> | 2 livres 10 sols |
| | or |
| | 4 livres |
| <i>Veste satin</i> | 2 livres |
| <i>Gillet</i> | 2 livres 10 sols |
| <i>Gillet riche</i> | 3 livres 10 sols |

Table 5.3. Prices paid to embroiderers by Villoud, Cadet et Cie per commission, 1785-88. Source: 8 B 1280/1-2.

These account books suggest that for an averagely-priced waistcoat of 15 *livres*, the labour cost Villoud 2 *livres* or 3 *livres*. Wages thus only represented around 10-15 percent of the final product and are comparable with those found in Megret's daybook for Paris, some sixty years earlier. The timescales in the order books suggest how long it took to embroider the types of waistcoats produced in Lyon. Allowance made for variations in the individual skill of different workers and the different types of products, at one end, one embroideress took nine days to deliver a completed waistcoat for a payment of 2 *livres* 10 *sols*; that works out as 5.5 *sols* per day. This calculation does not take into account the fact that we do not know how many hours a day she worked on this particular waistcoat, the complexity of the design, her skill as an embroideress, and other domestic commitments. Other embroideresses, for example, delivered a completed waistcoat to Villoud within three to six days for the same payment of 2 *livres* 10 *sols*. What this information does imply, is that Saint-Aubin's claims about women's wages in the embroidery trade (25 *sols* per day), which were highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, were overly optimistic, did not take into account the variety of work being undertaken in the trade, and are unlikely to have been based on actual contemporary data. Further, that workers were not paid by the day, but by the piece, thus indicating that the product's embroidery had a particular value attached to it regardless of the amount of time it took to embroider (which could vary according to skill and other time commitments of the worker). Even if an embroideress were to turn around a waistcoat in the shorter time of three days, she would need to be regularly turning out the embroidery for which Villoud paid 4 *livres* to make the kind of money which Saint-Aubin suggested. This seems unlikely. The higher price paid suggests a greater amount of complexity either due to the skill

required to execute the design, the mere extent of the design, or the skill needed to work with material that was difficult and time-consuming to manipulate, such as sequins and glass beads. Taking an embroideress' average weekly income to be 2 *livres* 10 *sols*, then, and the working year to be 307 days long,⁷⁷ embroideresses could hope to earn in the region of 108 *livres* per annum, a far cry from the Saint-Aubin's assertions, which would work out at around 307 *livres* per annum. For a worker who was able to consistently embroider a waistcoat within three days, she could expect to earn around 255 *livres*. As a point of comparison, seamstresses earned around 100-150 *livres* per annum,⁷⁸ the income of an unskilled labourer was around 200-300 *livres* whilst an artisan earned around 500 *livres*.⁷⁹ According to Jean Sgard, a skilled worker in the luxury trades, such as a cabinet-maker, earned around 400 *livres* per annum, with some earning up to 750 *livres* by the end of the century.⁸⁰ This is reinforced by the case of Paris, where labour in the guild-regulated trade also cost around 10 percent of the final product, regardless of the materials being used. Falling somewhere along the lower end of the spectrum of artisan wages, then, workers in the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France were highly skilled, yet their wages did not necessarily reward them as such. It can thus be concluded that the presence of a guild was not necessary to meet consumer demand, nor was it beneficial in the regulation of work, wages and skill.

Conclusion

Consumer demand during the eighteenth century had a profound effect on the way in which embroidery was produced. This chapter has examined the effects of the dual nature of consumer demand on production, wherein embroiderers found themselves in a complicated entanglement of credit, subcontracting and skill. The rigid nature of the guild and its regulations in eighteenth-century Paris made the profitable production of

⁷⁷ Jan de Vries, 'Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 85-132 (pp. 107-14).

⁷⁸ Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, p. 325.

⁷⁹ Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime*, trans. Jean Birrell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸⁰ Jean Sgard, 'L'Échelle des revenus', *Dix-huitième siècle, au tournant des lumières: 1780-1820*, 14 (1982), 425-33 (p. 426).

embroidery an increasingly difficult business, with master embroiderers engaging in illegal subcontracting relationships with workers in the privileged areas of Paris to meet demand for the elaborate gold and silver embroidery required of court etiquette. The statutes of the guild of embroiderers stipulated that master embroiderers were not permitted to give work to journeymen to be completed outside of their premises. Further still, embroiderers to the king, and to queens, princes and princesses, were not permitted to give work to journeymen at all, they were only to give work to master embroiderers. In practice, however, the relationship between masters and journeymen was less straightforward and the realities of urban working life, where the regularity of client orders and thus workload was difficult to predict, meant that non-guild workers were an integral link in luxury trades such as embroidery. Furthermore, it was specifically female non-guild workers who contributed to the success of the embroidery trade in eighteenth-century France in spite of their exclusion from the guild.

In reality and in contrast to the theoretical discourse of the guild, embroiderers in Paris responded to courtly consumer demand for gold and silver embroidery through complicated and extensive networks of subcontracting. This enabled them firstly to meet consumer demand through a specialisation of labour; secondly, to maintain high standards of quality; and thirdly, to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuations in consumer demand. Whilst it could be argued that flexible production in the form of subcontracting was favoured by the embroiderers as it enabled them to meet the individuality which their clientele demanded, in reality it was the complicated credit relations with their customers which determined this way of working.

Furthermore, as this chapter has demonstrated, subcontracting in the Paris embroidery trade led to a lack of guild control over the organisation of production, and the presence of a parallel production network operating out of the privileged areas can be seen as evidence that consumer demand was not being met adequately by those operating within guild regulations. More specifically, it was consumer demand for gold and silver embroidery associated with courtly tradition which was being furnished by non-guild workers. As the legal cases in this chapter have demonstrated, female workers in the privileged areas were able to produce embroidery in false gold and silver with such art that the deception was almost impossible to perceive. Yet non-guild workers did not necessarily equate to unskilled workers. On the contrary, this chapter has demonstrated that the embroidery produced in the privileged areas of Paris, such as the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, was of an extremely high standard, as is evidenced through the guild's anxiety

that the practice of embroidering with false gold and silver was impossible to detect in a finished piece of work. Finally, the fashionable embroidery produced in Lyon was cheaper and faster to produce and consumer demand for products such as embroidered waistcoats was met by a mostly female workforce. The absence of a guild enabled Lyon-based embroiderers to quickly produce a higher volume of output suitable for the fashion-driven market of Paris. Similar to the privileged areas of Paris, the non-guild status of female embroiderers in Lyon was integral to the success of meeting consumer demand for a certain type of embroidered product, namely waistcoats with silk tambour embroidery.

CONCLUSION

This is the first study to consider French embroidery within the wider socio-economic context of eighteenth-century consumption, retail and production. This has been achieved through a combination of archival and object-based research which has posited a new understanding of the professional embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France. This thesis has argued that consumer demand had a tangible effect on the ways in which embroidery for secular clothing was designed, retailed and produced during the eighteenth century. Embroidery was a flexible luxury product: it evolved to meet the ever-changing needs and desires of its heterogeneous clientele, all the while maintaining its status as an exclusive and fashionable embellishment.

The ways in which embroidery was consumed by the European elite over the course of the eighteenth century evolved into two parallel branches of the same market. An analysis of artefacts, designs, account books and the fashion press has shown that elite consumers bought expensive and 'traditional' embroidery out of necessity to conform to the sartorial etiquette of the court. On the other hand, it has shown that the same consumers simultaneously purchased a new style of embroidery which was considered more fashionable and was, to a certain extent, cheaper than the gold and silver embroidery worn for formal court appearances. The dual nature of consumer demand for embroidery – that of etiquette and that of fashion – had a profound effect on the ways in which embroidery was produced during the eighteenth century.

This thesis has made five important contributions to current scholarship. It has firstly challenged the generally-accepted dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' luxury by offering the case of embroidery as a flexible and adaptable luxury product. Secondly, it has highlighted the interactions between consumers, designers and merchants and has brought to the fore the importance of these interdependent relationships in making not only a luxury product, but in shaping ideas about taste and style. From this, the retail and distribution channels for embroidery expanded as merchants and embroiderers sought to cater to the diverse needs of their clientele. This thesis has thirdly questioned assumptions about Paris as the centre of fashion and taste during the eighteenth century and has offered evidence that Lyon also had an important role in contributing to the creation of taste during the later years of the period. Furthermore, not only has this thesis extended the geographical focus of taste, but it has also compared the structure of the embroidery trade in both Paris and Lyon in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the

complex relationship between the two cities. This relationship has been an important consideration for examining the consumer base of French embroidery during the eighteenth century. This thesis has demonstrated that the embroidery trade in both Paris and Lyon supplied an international and elite clientele. In this respect, it has made an important contribution to scholarship on luxury consumption by illuminating how the same product could be adapted to the different needs of one clientele, thus highlighting a flexibility in the luxury trades which to date, has not been fully explored. Finally, this thesis has made a new contribution to the history of pre-industrial production by examining the making of embroidery within the context of the guild system. It has highlighted the role of women in the trade and the complex networks of subcontracting which contributed to the flexibility of embroidery as a luxury product.

This study has used a range of methodological approaches and sources. Utilising account books, merchant correspondence and legal documents has foregrounded the importance of embroidery as a commercial activity, which to date, has been obscured by a focus on the aesthetic qualities of embroidery. Drawing upon sources used in material culture studies, such as embroidered clothing and samples, has provided tangible evidence of the dynamic consumer-producer relationship during this period. Furthermore, a critical engagement with Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin's 1770 publication, *L'Art du brodeur*, has enabled me to challenge some of this author's claims about embroidery. As the first 'history' of the French professional embroidery trade, Saint-Aubin's work has been relied upon by countless contemporaries and historians in their discussion of techniques, materials, and business practices. Yet re-examining the text alongside archival sources has provided a clearer understanding of exactly how the trade was organised. Bankruptcy records and legal disputes have shown that Saint-Aubin's text did not necessarily capture fully the trade and that the book presented the embroidery trade in its most uncomplicated form.

This thesis has thus investigated the theory and the contrasting reality of the embroidery trade of eighteenth-century France. An 'official' discourse surrounds both the consumption and production of embroidery which to date, has been received relatively uncritically. Printed documents, such as *L'Art du brodeur*, sumptuary laws and guild statutes have presented a history of the trade which promotes it as one of straightforward prestige and quality. These sources have obscured the complex nature of a trade which in reality, was highly idiosyncratic. This was a direct result of the heterogeneous clientele which it served, one which had a variety of diverse needs and

desires, and which oscillated continually between sartorial etiquette and fashionable distinction.

Beginning with the consumption of embroidery rather than its production forces us to rethink the ways in which luxury goods, fashion, and taste were created during this period. Interrogating embroidery through the lens of consumption demonstrates the extent to which production was the result of a symbiotic relationship between consumers and producers. It highlights that elite consumers showed complex needs due to their fluctuating social, economic and cultural context over the course of the eighteenth century. Embroidery for court clothing continued to be one of the main products of the embroidery trade in eighteenth-century France. Such clothing changed little over the course of the eighteenth century and was consumed out of a 'duty of rank' in order to conform to court etiquette. Yet at the same time a form of fashionable embroidered court clothing emerged, and was consumed by the same clientele who purchased the 'old' luxury of court etiquette. Evidence of the variations of the same product which was examined in Chapters 1 and 3 suggests that a straightforward dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' luxury is not a useful way of categorising luxury goods. This thesis has therefore challenged the concept of 'old' and 'new' luxury. It has argued that embroidery complicates this dichotomy, and that an alternative concept – in which the distinctions of 'old' and 'new' are more fluid – should be applied when considering luxury goods. The luxury trades of eighteenth-century Paris, which served a heterogeneous elite clientele, did not necessarily produce goods which fit neatly into two distinct categories.

This thesis has thus demonstrated that embroidery was a highly adaptable embellishment which was repackaged by the second half of the eighteenth century as a fashionable luxury product. It was able to shed the connotations of the excess of the 'old' luxury associated with the ostentatious expenditure of the aristocracy. This was the result of a symbiotic relationship between consumers, designers, producers and merchants, whose interdependent networks of communication produced a shared understanding of taste in embroidery design. This shared understanding was pronounced in contemporary correspondence, which served to communicate the ideals of 'taste' in embroidery design which consisted of novelty and reasonable price. These ideals were particularly aligned to those of the 'new' luxuries. Designers and producers thus responded to such consumer demand by creating products which appealed to their elite customers' desire for both novelty and distinction, and the need to adhere to etiquette and tradition. Moreover, an analysis of the symbiotic relationship between consumption and production has

necessitated a re-examination of taste formation in the eighteenth century. In particular, it has challenged the generally-accepted view that Paris was the centre of taste and attributed greater agency to Lyon as a leader of fashionable taste. The commercial correspondence of merchants, the fashion press of the late eighteenth century, and surviving artefacts are testament to Lyon's role as a major producer of fashionable taste during the late eighteenth century.

The co-existence of the two styles of embroidery for etiquette and fashion further had a profound effect on the retailing and distribution channels of embroidery over the course of the eighteenth century. The retailing and marketing activities of professional embroiderers and the *marchands merciers* of Paris which were analysed in Chapter 3 suggest that two branches of the market for embroidery developed in parallel to serve the different needs of its elite clientele. The embroidery trade thus adapted to a varied consumer demand by diversifying its retail and distribution channels. The collaboration of Lyon embroiderers with the Paris *marchands merciers* was particularly effective in selling embroidery as a novel and fashionable product to its elite clientele. This was achieved through a combination of marketing techniques such as the *marchands merciers*' use of trade cards to advertise 'Lyon' embroidery, and the Lyon embroidery merchants' distribution of samples to showcase their product variety.

Furthermore, an analysis of correspondence and account books has revealed the extent to which French embroidery was consumed on an international scale. The broad geographical reach of French embroidery was not only due to France's esteemed reputation for fashion and luxury, but also to a diversification in methods of retailing during this period. As the first three chapters of this thesis demonstrated, ready-embroidered waistcoat panels travelled widely and enabled the professional embroiderers of eighteenth-century France to sell their products on a broader scale than previously thought. Relatively simple to transport and available in an enormous variety of designs and prices, embroidered waistcoat panels made their way across Europe through networks of merchants and informal social relationships. Smuggling also enabled the international consumption of French embroidered products, as evidenced by the custom-stamped waistcoat panels in Chapter 1. Combined with the improvements in communications and transport infrastructure towards the end of the eighteenth century, French embroidered products were increasingly retailed throughout Europe. French embroidery was avidly consumed by a diverse and international clientele, as evidenced by the correspondence between elite British consumers such as Grantham.

By demonstrating the broad geographical reach of what can be considered a small and 'local' trade, this thesis has made a new contribution to economic history. Studies in economic history have tended to focus solely on either the consumption or the production of textiles, in which there has been a tendency to focus on large quantitative data sets. This in turn has prioritised the larger trading histories of global textile commodities such as cotton and silk. This thesis, by contrast, has analysed an ancillary trade of these markets through a consideration of both quantitative and qualitative information. It has investigated the wider socio-economic context of embroidery by examining the product at various stages of its lifecycle, both pre- and post-production, together with a consideration of the contemporary discussions surrounding embroidery in personal and commercial correspondence, the periodical press and guild documents.

In considering embroidery from multiple viewpoints – that of the consumer, retailer, guild and producer – a new understanding of the trade has emerged in which it is apparent that the establishment of complex relationships was essential to the international success of embroidery as a fashionable item. Interdependent relationships between consumers, merchants, designers and embroiderers underpinned the making of this luxury product. As shown in Chapter 2, the interactions between consumers, merchants and designers shaped fashionable design in embroidery, whilst the complicated networks of subcontracting between embroiderers, customers and suppliers which were examined in Chapter 5 fostered the necessary flexibility to meet a varied consumer demand throughout the century. As a result, embroidery was able to satisfy both the requirements of etiquette and the desire for fashion.

The final two chapters examined this flexibility within the context of production, examining the effects of consumption on the making of embroidery and by extension, its producers. Yet this flexibility was not born of the guild system which controlled the French trades during this period, but was rather a product of non-guild production. As we have seen in Chapters 4 and 5, the embroidery trade in Paris was institutionally complex, with the guild-regulated trade and the non-guild regulated privileged areas co-existing until 1791. In Lyon too, the institutional environment in which the embroiderers operated was complicated. The embroiderers did not form a guild in Lyon, choosing instead to practise their trade independent of guild protection – or interference – even when consumer demand for embroidered textiles significantly increased in the 1770s. The extent to which the guild in Paris was effective in meeting consumer demand for embroidery is brought into question by factors such as the alternative market for

embroidery operating in parallel to the one which the guild supplied. The presence of this unregulated trade suggests that the guild provided an ineffective production framework for meeting consumer demand for embroidered products. Similarly, the *Grande Fabrique* in Lyon was held back by outmoded statutes which were still dictated by the fashions of years gone by. This thesis has thus argued that it was due to their non-guild status that the embroiderers of Lyon were able to furnish the flourishing market for fashionable embroidery during the late eighteenth century.

Indeed, both the Paris guild and the *Grande Fabrique* expressed concern that the unregulated use of false gold and silver materials in embroidery resulted in inferior work and the deception of customers. Yet as demonstrated in Chapter 5, such deception was only of concern to the guilds and not the customer, since it was almost impossible to detect the presence of false materials in a finished product. Rather, it was production rights and profits which motivated both the Paris guild and the *Grand Fabrique* to seek to regulate the embroidery trade. With no guild to regulate the trade in the privileged areas and Lyon, and thus the use of false gold and silver materials in these areas, these embroiderers had a competitive advantage whereby they could produce fashionable embroidery at a lower cost and meet consumer demand faster than workers confined by guild regulation.

Another aspect of this study is particularly important in opening up the significance of embroidery as a traditional yet flexible trade. Scholarship on early modern production and manufacturing has focused on those trades which made significant technological progress during the eighteenth century, and has examined these developments within the context of the increased consumption of the middle classes. Such research has obscured the continuing importance of those trades which served a smaller clientele and perpetuated traditional techniques. The production of embroidery did not undergo any significant technical advancement over the course of the eighteenth century. It did not engage with technological innovation and did not take any steps towards mechanisation. Nevertheless, the trade did not stagnate. On the contrary, it evolved in other ways to meet a varied consumer demand. This thesis has argued that the two distinct spheres of consumption which have been examined in this thesis – that of courtly etiquette and that of fashion – led to dynamism in the embroidery trade that was not a result of technical advancement, but rather was characterised by elaborate networks of consumer and supplier credit, subcontracting and clandestine production. Further, that these networks were underpinned by the work of women. It has shown that the

embroiderers arranged themselves into complicated subcontracting networks, organising their work according to skill. This specialisation of tasks enabled them to meet consumer demand for novelty, variety and individuality, all the while maintaining quality standards and weathering the risks associated with fluctuations in consumer demand.

In a similar vein, no study to date has investigated the subcontracting networks within the embroidery trade. Whilst work was subcontracted to embroiderers by tailors, seamstresses, coachmakers and upholsterers, the embroiderers themselves in turn subcontracted this work within their own work, organising themselves into complicated and intricate labour networks. These complex networks of subcontracting extended across guild jurisdiction, with master embroiderers frequently engaging in clandestine production by distributing work to the *ouvriers sans qualité*. It was apparent that even the Dauphin of France – whether wittingly or not – was a consumer of embroidered clothing produced by the non-guild workers of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Historians have suggested that such illicit production was a symptom of growing consumer demand for novel products, and it was in the privileged areas in particular that innovation flourished.¹ Yet the case of the embroidery trade shows that traditional products were also produced in the privileged areas of Paris. Moreover, that it was a subversion of tradition – in which women took on the role traditionally accorded to male masters – which was taking place in these areas. The case of Lyon further demonstrated the importance of women to the embroidery trade, and that it was their non-guild status in particular which enabled them to meet the increasing demand for fashionable embroidery during the late eighteenth century. This comparative analysis in Chapter 5 changes our understanding of pre-industrial production in the luxury trades by offering an alternative view of the traditional artisan workshop, in which the male master directed his workers and that expensive, luxury products were made by the hands of talented craftsmen. It has shown that luxury goods were also produced under the direction of highly-skilled women, as evidenced by the workshop run by the widow Duport in Paris in the 1750s. Furthermore, it has shown

¹ See for example: Steven L. Kaplan, 'Les corporations, les 'faux ouvriers' et le faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 43/2 (1988), 353-78; Cissie Fairchild, 'The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 228-48.

how production could be successfully organised when there was no precedent set by a guild.

Comparing two centres of production – that of Paris and that of Lyon – has therefore highlighted the complex nature of the embroidery trade and the contrasting institutional environments in which embroidery was produced in France. Studies on specific trades have tended to focus on one centre of production, but examining the ways in which the embroidery trade operated in two contrasting large cities has been important for understanding the extent to which different centres of production co-existed to meet a varied national and international consumer demand for fashionable products. It has highlighted that one city was not necessarily superior to the other in the products that it produced. Rather, such a comparison has been essential to understanding the interdependency of Paris and Lyon in matters of fashion, design and retailing, and has emphasised the importance of Lyon as a major producer of embroidery in its own right. A sole consideration of Paris would have obscured the role that Lyon played in designing and producing the fashionable embroidery which was stocked in the shops of the Paris *marchands merciers*, and would have told just one side of the story: embroidery produced for the sartorial etiquette of the court. Including Lyon in this thesis has therefore made an important contribution to understanding the flexibility of embroidery in meeting the demand of its elite clientele for novelty and fashion.

Thus far, the story of the embroidery trade in eighteenth-century France that has been presented in this thesis has encompassed Paris and Lyon. Going forward, broadening the geographical focus of this study to other cities in France such as Bordeaux or Marseilles might provide complementary insights into how the trade was organised nationally and the product range of different cities. Furthermore, an examination of the full product range of the embroidery trade has been beyond the current scope of this thesis. Looking to the future, a consideration of embroidered products beyond dress and beyond embroidery on silk would offer new insights into different consumers and markets. Finally, moving beyond the Revolution to examine how embroidery was consumed and produced in a post-guild society would further illuminate both continuity and change in a trade which Saint-Aubin suggested was able to continually bring back embroidery in ‘a thousand different forms’.²

² ‘mille formes différentes’. Charles Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Art of the Embroiderer*, trans. Nikki Scheuer (Boston and Los Angeles: David R. Godine and Los Angeles County Museum, 1983), p. 2.

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